

1964 - 1984

PLAYS

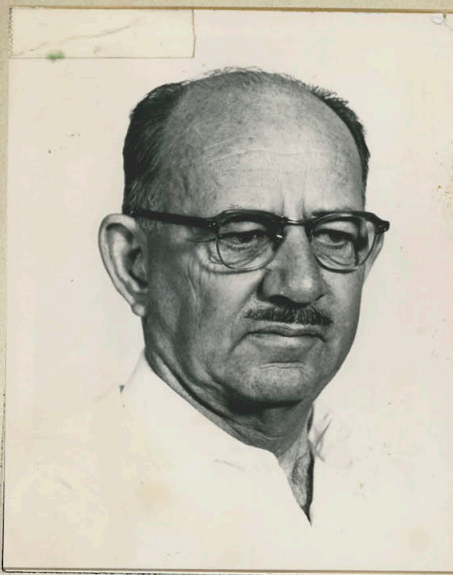
LIST OF PLAYS
1964 - 1984

1. Fall 1964
"Anniversary Waltz" (First play a comedy)
 2. Spring 1965
"Four Faces of Comedy" (Comedy)
 3. Fall 1965
"Dinny and the Witches" (William Gibson fantasy frolic)
 4. Spring 1966
"Deadwood Dick" (Melodrama)
 5. Fall 1966
"Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mama's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad" (Arthur Kopit comedy)
 6. Spring 1967
"Forty" (Dr. Gerald A. Larson comedy)
 7. Jan 1968
"Our Town" (Thornton Wilder classic)
 8. Jan 1969
"The Time of Your Life" (William Saroyan comedy)
 9. Fall 1969
"The Tavern" (George M. Cohan melodrama)
 10. Fall 1970
"The Girls in 509" (Howard Teichmann comedy)
 11. Spring 1971
"Luv" (Murray Schisgal comedy)
 12. Fall 1971
"A Thousand Clowns" (Herb Gardner comedy)
 13. Spring 1972
"A Lion in Winter" (James Goldman comedy)
 14. Fall 1972
"Dark of the Moon" (Howard Richardson play)
 15. Spring 1973
"Harvey" (Mary Chase comedy)
 16. Fall 1973
"Tartuffe" (Moliere comedy)
 17. Spring 1974
"Anything Goes" (Cole Porter musical)
 18. Fall 1974
"Ten Nights in a Barroom" (William W. Pratt musical melodrama)
 19. Spring 1975
"The House of Blue Leaves" (John Guare story)
 20. Fall 1975
"See How They Run" (Phillip King comedy)
 21. Spring 1976
"Little Mary Sunshine" (Rich Besoyan musical)
 22. Fall 1976
"One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" (Ken Kesey mental ward drama)
-
23. Spring 1977
"6 Rms Riv Vu" (50's comedy)
 24. Fall 1977
"Once Upon a Mattress" (musical fairytale)
 25. Spring 1978
"The Night of the Iguana" (Tennessee Williams drama)
 26. Fall 1978
"Little Murders" (Black comedy)
 27. Spring 1979
"Girl Crazy" (Gershwin musical)
 28. Fall 1979
"A Flea in Her Ear" (George Feydeau comedy)
 29. Spring 1980
"Sugar" (Musical based on "Some Like it Hot")
 30. Fall 1980
"Twelfth Night" (Shakespeare play)
 31. Spring 1981
"Company" (Stephen Sondheim musical)
 32. Fall 1981
"The Mousetrap" (Agatha Christie mystery)
 33. Spring 1982
"Chapter Two" (Neil Simon comedy)
 34. Fall 1982
"Ah, Wilderness" (Eugene O'Neill comedy)
 35. Winter 1983
"Jacque Brel is Alive & Well & Living in Paris" (Jacque Brel musical)
 36. Spring 1983
"Cabaret" (Musical)
 37. Fall 1983
"Blithe Spirit" (Noel Coward comedy occult)
 38. Winter 1984
"Spoon River Anthology" (Drama)
 39. Spring 1984
"Side by Side" (Stephen Sondheim musical)



Mary Ann Winters checks the point.

A new Face
for an Old Place!



Harry Bauer



Grace Bowen



Dinny And Witches Pleases Reviewer, Plays On Weekend

By FRANCIS FLAHERTY
Times-Herald Staff Writer

The Benicia Old Town Players have a long game when they choose the decidedly offbeat "Dinny and the Witches" for their second play in their brief existence.

But the gamble paid off at last. The play, which was made available to weekend audiences at the dinner-theatre venture in IDES Hall. The play will be repeated Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights, and advance reports are that sizable throngs again will be on hand for the final showings.

Reservations are still available Friday and Sunday nights. On Friday, cocktails will be at 6 p.m., dinner at 7, and curtain at 8:30. Sunday cocktails will be at 4:30 p.m., dinner 5:30 and curtain at 7:30. Reservations can be made by telephoning 745-0130; 745-0136 or 642-4186.

UNUSUAL DEPTH

The play, while not everything that a playwright might hope for, nevertheless contains elements of unusual depth, power and beauty. Plus considerable humor.

"What else do you want?" an aggrieved playwright might ask. "Amn't" depth, power, beauty and humor just about all that can possibly be incorporated into a drama?"

Yes and No. The play also weaves a message, or purports to do so, and at times along the way the message gets garbled.

We can't be sure whether Gibson is inveighing against things ugly, man's inhumanity, etc., or admonishing us all to wear a smile on our umbrellas, or the message nonetheless is there.

Farce has been termed the most difficult medium in which an actor can work, but if this be so, fantasy has to run a close second.

"Dinny and the Witches" rises as a pure fantasy, although the author admits he isn't sure whether he's writing a fantasy, allegory or just a lie.

GOOD SHOW

At any rate, the Old Town cast sings it to the stage with good magnificence, and here seems to be an end to the old at this cast was selected with out the same degree of offbeatness that Vince Lombardi plays in choosing his offensive and defensive linemen for the San Bay Packers.

There certainly is nothing new with proprietary casting—ing out and getting the right time in its tracks through a couple of eerie errors and goes on an earnest search for perfection, but in what shape or form he can't decide. Jim Harper turned in a magnificent performance in a demanding role that called forth some terrific lines, and was capably backed by cute Lynda York as Amy, the three witches, Rhea Leonard as Zenobia; Edith Lewis as Luella, and Bridgett Villani as Uga, completely captivated the audience as they latched their parts with what seemed to be joy abandon and really called for perfect timing and some pretty fancy footwork. In fact, the whole cast was just right, with special notice demanded by Tom Colt, as Jake, whose drunk scenes were hilarious.

The three ladies of the night, Thea Batchelor, Jackie Kee and Jody Daugherty, had their first appearance onstage slightly marred by too loud music covering their opening song, but the dance routines were well done and the audience really didn't need the vocal interpretations.

PLAYS BEN

Benicia barrister Bob Winters played Ben the blind man, a role that demanded some serious lines, very well, and the three kings, Don Parikh, Ben Johnson and Jim Higgins were very good, with some of Higgins' reactions provoking the audience to delight. Leonard Juell gave a good performance as Stonehenge.

The stage setting was appropriately eerie, with two set pieces borrowed from Pinocchio's Rainbow at the Hyatt Music Theater in Burlingame adding a great deal. The lighting was superbly done, and the sound effects, particularly the trumpet calls, very fine.

Prior to the rise of the curtain, the Benicia Old Town band entertained the first-nighters, and the "Benicia Bunnies" received a lot of appreciative comment, at least from the men in the audience.

Tickets are still on sale for "Dinny and the Witches" and are available at Fitzgerald's Hardware, Winters & Winters Law Office, 745-0130, and from ticket chairman Paul Conrad.

Benicia Herald Thurs. Sept. 30, 1965



BENICIA OLD TOWN GROUP REHEARSES

Rehearsals now are under way by the Benicia Old Town Group for their forthcoming production "Dinny and the Witches" which will go on the boards Oct. 22, 30 and 31 and again Nov. 5, 6 and 7 in the IDES Hall on West J St. Director Charles McDermon, left, watches as Thea Batchelor demonstrates an intricate dance step which she will work into the production in her capacity as choreography director. Mrs. Batchelor also will play a chorus girl in the production. Harry Bauer, who directed the highly-successful "Anniversary Waltz," is serving as producer for this show.

Bewitching Experience With 'Dinny'

By DORA FRIEDRICH
Eerie, exceptionally exciting and well worth the short drive to Benicia to see is the current offering of the Benicia Old Town Players — William Gibson's strange story of a young man in search of perfection — "Dinny and the Witches."

Directed by Charles T. McDermon, drama coach of Vallejo Junior College, certainly must be well-versed in theatrics, as he had done a superb job coaching his disciples.

There were a few technical flaws which should be corrected — imperfect lighting, such as spotlights that were supposed to be focused and weren't; shooting stars that failed to fall, some noise backstage. But the faults of this play, which continues this weekend, are very minor in comparison to its assets.

Even an experienced director is lost unless he has talent to mold — but of this Mr. McDermon has an abundance. In the title role of "Dinny" is Jim Harper of Pleasant Hill, who has both good looks and tremendous stage presence on his side. His physical movements are smooth and positive, his speaking and singing voice projected and resonant. Mr. Harper made this young man on the trail of a shooting star

very credible and very understandable, which is a remarkable feat considering the fantasy which surrounds him.

A real scene-stealer in a play in which a scene could be a little difficult to steal is one of the three wonderful witches, Uga is Uga, the character she portrays, but beautiful is the only way to describe the interpretation of this mischievous witch by Bridgett Villani. Every moment she was on stage we were very much aware of Miss Villani's talents, regardless of where she stood or what she was doing. Little theatre could well use many more of her caliber as an actress. It would be interesting to see her in a different role to see if this quality can be sustained.

Equally brilliant as the other two witches who decree the fate of mere mortals are Rhea Leonard as Zenobia and Edith Lewis as Luella, the winsome witch who later earned a halo for herself. They were fascinating and funny, or if the occasion demanded, terribly dramatic.

Proving that first impressions can be wrong was our opinion of the performance by Lynda York as Amy, the young girl in search of Dinny. It was only during the "Seven Deadly Sins" scene that we realized how completely versatile a performer this young lady is. She was vivacious and vivid, or a bit bland as the role demanded.

As Jake, the drunk with a wife, asserted by her, seven instances were the demands of this characterization met.

Every inch the financial wizard he portrayed was Leonard Juell as B. O. Stonehenge, who gave a commanding performance.

Tom, Dick and Harry, as interpreted by Don Parikh, Jim Higgins and Ben Johnson were well played, as were the "ladies of the night" Thea Batchelor as Dawn; Jacquelyn Kee as Chloe, and Jody Daugherty as Bubbles (Algonquin 4-6229). This trio of temptresses was at the same time worldly, wiggly and refreshing! Miss Batchelor is also deserving of

Old Town Comedy Big Hit

By MARILYN MITCHELL

BENICIA — The Benicia Old Town Players presented a slick production of a farout fantasy to a slightly stunned, but enthusiastic, first night audience last night in the Old Town Theatre in Benicia.

"Dinny And The Witches" by William Gibson (Two For The Seesaw) was the three-act frolic (fantasy? allegory?) offered to a full house of dinner-theatre patrons, and was ably produced and directed by Harry Bauer and Charles McDermon, respectively, both of whom deserve big bouquets for giving a somewhat bizarre vehicle the "just right" treatment.

COMEDY HERO

The hero of this three-act comedy is Dinny Jones, an average American young man, who stops time in its tracks through a couple of eerie errors and goes on an earnest search for perfection, but in what shape or form he can't decide. Jim Harper turned in a magnificent performance in a demanding role that called forth some terrific lines, and was capably backed by cute Lynda York as Amy, the three witches, Rhea Leonard as Zenobia; Edith Lewis as Luella, and Bridgett Villani as Uga, completely captivated the audience as they latched their parts with what seemed to be joy abandon and really called for perfect timing and some pretty fancy footwork. In fact, the whole cast was just right, with special notice demanded by Tom Colt, as Jake, whose drunk scenes were hilarious.

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PLAYS BEN

Benicia barrister Bob Winters played Ben the blind man, a role that demanded some serious lines, very well, and the three kings, Don Parikh, Ben Johnson and Jim Higgins were very good, with some of Higgins' reactions provoking the audience to delight. Leonard Juell gave a good performance as Stonehenge.

The stage setting was appropriately eerie, with two set pieces borrowed from Pinocchio's Rainbow at the Hyatt Music Theater in Burlingame adding a great deal. The lighting was superbly done, and the sound effects, particularly the trumpet calls, very fine.

Prior to the rise of the curtain, the Benicia Old Town band entertained the first-nighters, and the "Benicia Bunnies" received a lot of appreciative comment, at least from the men in the audience.

Tickets are still on sale for "Dinny and the Witches" and are available at Fitzgerald's Hardware, Winters & Winters Law Office, 745-0130, and from ticket chairman Paul Conrad.



OPENING NIGHT patrons who attended the Benicia Old Town Players production of "Dinny and the Witches" last weekend were enthusiastic over the production, which will have its final staging tonight in the Benicia Old Town Theater. Left, Charles McDermon, who shared directing honors with Harry Bauer, chats with Mr. and Mrs. Cecil McDonald. Above, "Benicia Bunny" Genevieve Coomrad stands by to serve Mr. and Mrs. Otto Recknagel, left, and Mr. and Mrs. Carl Recknagel. Lower left, Mr. and Mrs. John Derby accept cocktails from another "Benicia Bunny," Roberta MacFaden. Below, "Bunny" Barbara Frey hands programs to Mrs. D. E. Jenkins, Mr. Jenkins, Mrs. Edward H. Case and Mr. Case.—Times-Herald Photos

Times Herald 11-2-65



Old Town Auditions Wednesday

Try-outs for the casting of the Benicia Old Town Players next dinner-theatre production, "Dinny and the Witches," will be held Wednesday, June 2, at 7:30 p. m. in the I. O. O. F. Hall, 140 West J St., Benicia.

The play, "a frolic on grave matters," will open near Halloween. It concerns a young man who has come into possession of a page from the book of life and the efforts of three witches to ruin it. The play is cast for 15 all parts—seven male and seven female roles.

All actors in the area, experienced or inexperienced, are invited to audition. The Benicia Old Town Players also wishing establish a personnel file for or stock company, cordially invite anyone interested in any use of the theater to attend the try-outs. It is requested that no auditioning for acting parts be a current photograph of positive, if possible. Anyone wishing more information on this try-out call 745-0130 week days and 6236 evenings and weekends.

11-27-1965

FALL 1969

"THE TAVERN"

BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE, 140 WEST "J" ST. (I. D. E. S. Hall)
November 28, 29 December 5, 6 December 12, 13

The Solano College Department and The Benicia Old Town Group JOINTLY PRESENT

"The Tavern"

by George M. Cohan

Directed by
CHARLES T. McDERMON

Assistant Director
MISTRESS SUSAN RAE SCOTT

General Chairman
MME. GENEVIEVE COONRADT

DRAMATIS PERSONAE (in order of appearance)

ZACH	MASTER DENNIS MULLIGAN
SALLY	MISTRESS CHRISTINE WELLINS
FREEMAN	MISTER ROBERT K. WINTERS
WILLUM	MASTER ARNOLD HAMILTON
VAGABOND	MISTER SPENCER DAWSON
VIOLET	MADAME NORMA SHARON
GOVERNOR LAMSON	MISTER JAMES KELLEHER
MRS. LAMSON	MADAME MARY VICKERS
VIRGINIA LAMSON	MISTRESS MELISSA PRITCHETT
TOM ALLEN	MISTER TIM GORELANGTON
SHERIFF	MISTER PAT BRENNAN
SHERIFF'S MAN, EZRA	MISTER WILLIAM HATFIELD
SHERIFF'S MAN, JOSHUA	MISTER J. EUGENE BOYLE
ATTENDANT STEVENS	MISTER L. B. MARTI
PIANIST	ONEITA (Fingers) FEENEY
PROMPTER (if needed)	SUSAN RAE SCOTT

PLEASE REFRAIN FROM THROWING MONEY!!!

OLIO POTPOURRI

CHARLOTTE PRUITT	GEORGE M. COHAN MEDLEY
THELMA BATCHELOR	NAUGHTY NURSE

AND OTHER SURPRISE ACTS

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

Somewhere an Early American Past

ACT II

Two hours later Somewhere—An Early American Past
LADIES, PLEASE REMOVE YOUR HATS!!!

Benicia Old Town Group To Present 2-Act Melodrama

George M. Cohan's Robert Winters of Benicia plays swashbuckling melodrama "The Tavern" will be presented soon. Freeman, Norman Sharon, as Benicia Old Town Group and of America, plays the role of Solano College Drama Department, a mental hospital.

The two-act play, which the Spencer Dawson, well-known chutes an act of mystery, is a local theater goes, is cast directed by Charles T. McDermott as the Vagabond. Cohan wrote drama department.

The entertainment will be Dennis Mulligan as Zach, three consecutive Fridays and Arnold Hamilton as Willum, Saturdays, Nov. 28 and 29, Dec. James Kelleher as Governor, 5 and 6 and Dec. 12 and 13. Lamson, Mary Vickers as a An also will be featured between Mrs. Lamson, Melissa Pritchett acts as an added attraction.

The plot revolves around Gorelangton as Tom Allen, Pat unexpected guests who seek Brennan as the Sheriff, William shelter in the tavern or way Hatfield as the Sheriff's Man, station on a stormy night. Abby and Leslie Marti as Attendant Stevens.

Tickets may be obtained at the Muntz Music Co. in Vallejo, 605-5277; Benicia Stationery, 745-2276; the Winters and Winters Law Office in Benicia, 745-0130, or from members of the Benicia Old Town Group.

Admission includes the 7 p.m. catered dinner and the play at 8:30 p.m. A 6 p.m. no-host cocktail hour precedes the dinner. Tax and tip are included in the admission price.

The Benicia Old Town Theatre is located at 140 West J St.



Unexpected guests who seek shelter in "The Tavern" on a stormy night contribute to the plot of the entertaining melodrama planned soon as a joint effort of the Benicia Old Town Group and Solano Junior College Drama Department. The cast includes Spencer Dawson as the Vagabond, sitting top, and from left to right Christine Wellins as Sally, Dennis Mulligan as Zach and Arnie Hamilton as Willum. The dinner theater is planned Nov. 28-29 and Dec. 5-6 and Dec. 12-13 at the Old Town Theatre in Benicia, 140 West J St.—News-Chronicle Photo.

In the Fall of 1969 there was George M. Cohan's "The Tavern", the second production of a Melodrama, well received by the audiences at the Benicia Old Town Theatre. The theatre is Benicia's IDES Hall and its use all these years has been gratefully appreciated by the theatre group.

PAGE 13 — Vallejo Times-Herald, Wed., Dec. 10, 1969

Tavern Production Totally Enjoyable

By FRANCIS FLAHERTY | She portrays a demure woman who repeatedly accuses the Benicia Old Town Group virtually every male in the cast department currently are co- of contributing to her downfall, laboring again, and this time a circumstance that was a fig- their production is "The Tavern" of a hyper-active imagi- Tavern," which shapes up as a satire on melodrama.

Her performance was far and away better than anything she had previously done, and it's totally enjoyable despite the fact the action is at least mildly repetitious. One big reason the play is being so well received is that few casts within memory have given such an impression of absolutely being in love with what they're doing.

It's a big cast — 16 performers in all — and the direction was handled ably by Dennis Mulligan and Arnold Hamilton, head of the Solano College's drama department.

He confided that "The Tavern," by the late famed Christine Wellins, the tavern vaudeville George M. Cohan, maid, screeched nobly, (and "bombed" in New York around here it should be noted fit it the turn of the century when it was relatively easy to become it first was produced.

If it did, and there is no gunfire, distractions which oc- reason to doubt it, the underly cur with great frequency in- ing fact behind the failure prob- "The Tavern".

ably was that Cohan insisted. Piano accompaniment is on his work being taken provided by Onetta Feeneey, seriously.

McDermott and his players before, and the prompter was in their production, and that the blank pistol as required, probably accounts for the play. Our T.H. sidekick, Charlotte which laid an egg on Broadway. Pruitt, entertains between acts becoming a bit of some dimen- belting out a medley of Cohan's more famous tunes including sions in Benicia.

Spencer Dawson, identified "Mary," "45 Minutes from only as a vagabond, carriers Broadway," and "Yankee Doo- most of the action in "The die Dandy."

Tavern," which is set. The finale of the play also "somewhere in the early features a Cohan number, American past." "You're A Grand Old Flag."

The plot includes murder and this seems somewhat of robbery, ruination of an incongruity.

Others who contributed nobly every other major crime than the production include Mary facile mind of Cohan could Vickers, Tim Gorelangton, Pat devise and include in his story. Brennan, William Hatfield, and Dawson is ably abetted by J. Eugene Boyle.

This is dinner theatre, and there were several who were the food is catered by Claude particularly impressive. Settle of Vallejo's Redwood Pa- particularly impressive. "The Tavern" will have Sharon, who's been in most of final performances Friday the plays produced by the Old Saturday nights, with a Tavern Group in its brief history 7 and curtain time at

Benicia's Old Town group to present 'The Tavern'

"The Tavern," a melodrama described as a local version of Tom Jones, will be the next joint theatre presentation by the Benicia Old Town Group and Solano College Drama Department.

The two-act melodrama, written by George M. Cohan and directed by Charles T. McDermott who heads the college drama department, is a swashbuckling tale that takes place in a way station.

The production includes a between acts olio. The melodrama, planned as a dinner theatre on three consecutive Fridays and Saturdays, is scheduled Nov. 28 and 29, Dec. 5 and 6 and Dec. 12 and 13.

No-host cocktails are planned at 6 p.m., dinner at 7 p.m. and the play will follow at 8:30 p.m. Tax and tip are included in the \$8 admission.

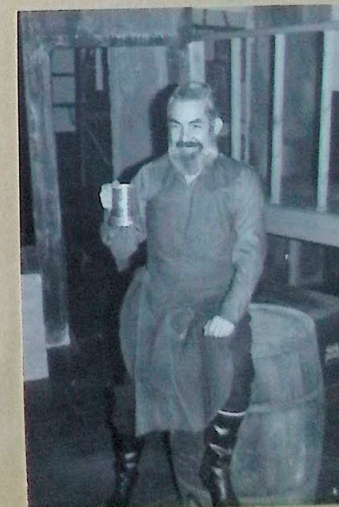
Cohan is reported to have written the leading role of the Vagabond for himself. Spence Dawson, leading man of the recent Mira Theatre hit "Any Wednesday" is cast as the Vagabond.

Other cast members in order of appearance are Dennis Mulligan as Zach, Christine Wellins as Sally, Robert Winters as Freeman, Arnold Hamilton as Willum, Norma Sharon as Violet, James Kelleher as Governor Lamson, Mary Vickers as Mrs. Lamson, Melissa Pritchett as Virginia Lamson, Tim Gorelangton as Tom Allen, Pat Brennan as the Sheriff, William Hatfield as the Sheriff's Man and Les Marti as Attendant Stevens.

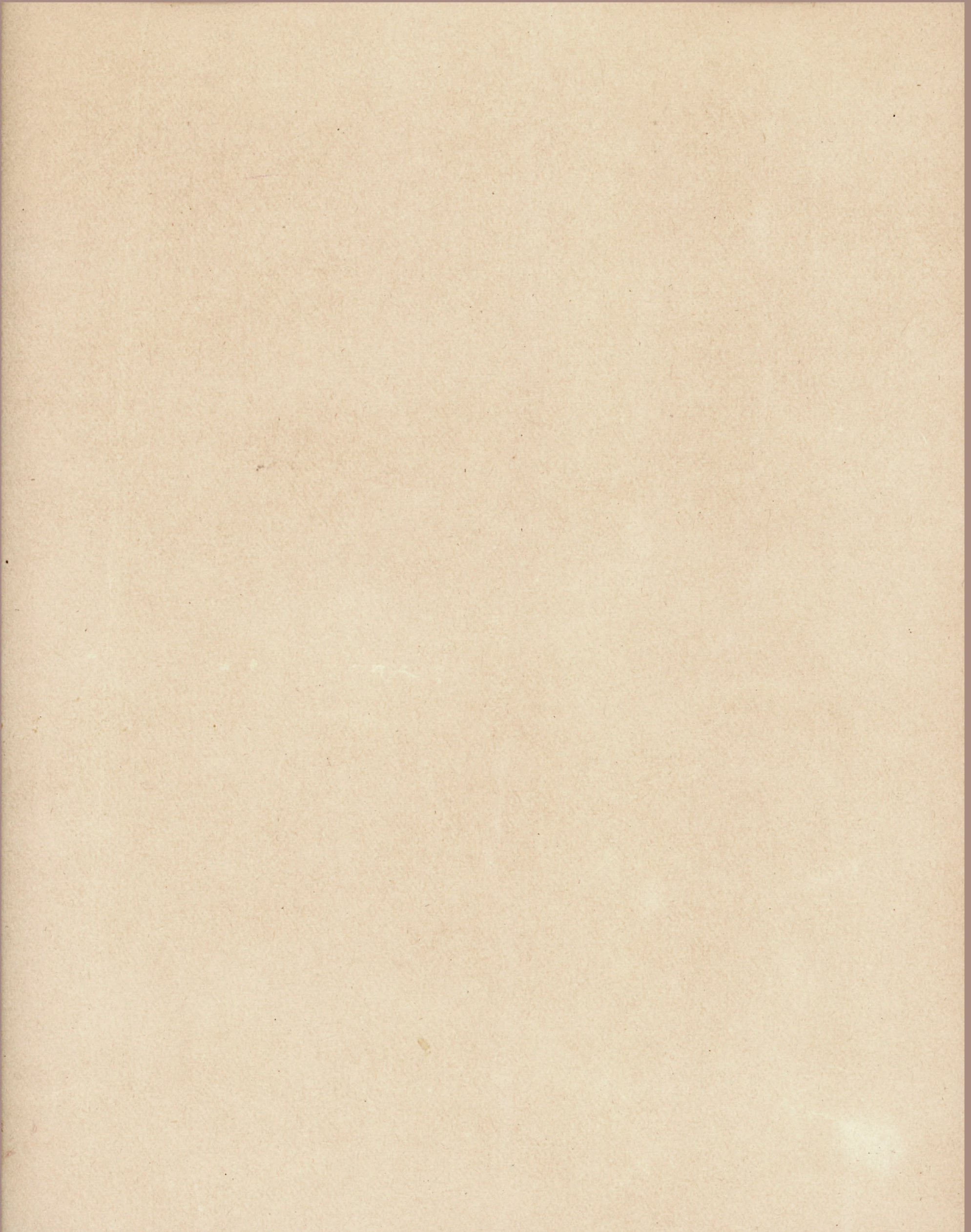
Ticket reservations may be obtained at the Muntz Music Co. in Vallejo, 605-5277; Benicia Stationery, 745-2276; the Winters and Winters Law Office in Benicia, 745-0130, or from members of the Benicia Old Town Group.

Gen Coonradt is general chairman and the following are serving as committee chairmen: Mary Ann Winte tickets and reservations Barbara Pearson, costume Pay Wyatt, programs, L Adams, posters and fly Charlotte and Lisa Pe publicity, Cathy Chris hostesses: Ron Adams, bus manager; Phyllis Malicki, and music; Ed Stone, spe effects and Doug Frey, construction.

Susan Rae Scott is asss director and Jeff Boyle technical director.



Robert Winters—
Inn Keeper



First Effort

Fall

1964

FALL 1964

"ANNIVERSARY WALTZ"

In 1964 the Benicia Old Town Players presented their first play, "Anniversary Waltz" for one weekend in November. The presentation was a success and the theater evenings have become eagerly awaited events each year.

Bill Granger is excited about the Benicia Old Town Theater production coming up. Casting is complete for "Anniversary Waltz" which will be staged Nov. 13 and 14, when the I.D.E.S. Hall will be transformed for a dinner-theater show. Bill says there are a couple of pros in the cast, and amateurs will start next

DRAMA MUSIC DANCE
Louise Johnson, c. 1964

The Benicia Old Town Players present Anniversary Waltz

by
JEROME CHODOROV and JOSEPH FIELDS

Produced by
HARRY BAUER

Directed by
BILL GRANGER

CAST
(In order of appearance)

Millie	RHEA LEONARD
Okkie Walters	BOB BAUER
Alice Walters	SALLY MEE
Debbie Walters	BARBARA LIGHTLE
Bud Walters	GENE MORETTON
Chris Steelman	LESTER HENSLEY
Janice Revere	EDITH LEWIS
Harry	TOM COLT
Sam	BRICK SPRINGER
Mr. Gans	HARRY BAUER
Mrs. Gans	GRACE BAUER
Handy man	BOB WINTERS

SCENES

The action of the play takes place in the living room of the Walters' apartment in New York City. The time is the present.

ACT ONE

Scene I: About 7 o'clock on a spring evening
Scene II: Four hours later
Twenty minute Intermission—Refreshments available at bar

ACT TWO

Scene I: The following morning
Scene II: That evening
Ten minute Intermission

ACT THREE

Scene I: A few minutes later
Scene II: A week later
Refreshments available after final curtain

Produced by special arrangements with Dramatists Play Service, Inc., New York

PRODUCTION STAFF

Assistant to Mr. Granger	Lynn Fitzpatrick
Technical Advisor to Old Town Group	Brick Springer
Properties	Tom Love
Make Up	Rhea Leonard
Set Design	Tom Colt
Set Construction	Garnard Ray, Richard Morris
Set Construction	Doug and Barbara Frey, Dorothy and Ed Stone, Lloyd and Hazel Tobin, Bing and Mary McKay, Mr. E. W. Crozer, Paul and Hazel
Jaunita Billings, Tom and Mary McKay, Mr. E. W. Crozer, Paul and Hazel	
Tobin, Bing and Mary McKay, Mr. E. W. Crozer, Paul and Hazel	
Winters, David and Linda Oakes, Norman Sterling, David Henderson, Tim McKay	
Furniture: Garnards Antiques, Mary Ann Winters, Helen Henderson, Dorothy Stone	

EXECUTIVE STAFF

Old Town Group Theater Chairman	Mary Ann Winters
I.D.E.S. Hall Representative	President Gerald Dana
Ticket Chairman	Mary McKay
Assistant to Mrs. McKay	Gaye Fitzgerald
Properties	Hazel Tobin, Paul Tobin, Dorothy Stone
Posters	James Marberry
Curtain Advertising Chairman	Gaye Fitzgerald
Assisted by	James Marberry, Richard Morris, Don McCaslin
Tickets and Programs	Charles Erwin, Marcus Griffin
Publicity	Fr. Charles Eldon Davis, Barbara Frey, Barbara Fugate
Building Redecoration Chairman	Garnard Ray
Assisted by	Doug and Barbara Frey, Bing Ray, Barbara Fugate, Paul and Hazel Tobin, Tom and Mary McKay, Lloyd and Jaunita Billings, Joe and Helen Henderson, Bob and Mary Ann Winters, David and Linda Oakes, Lynn and Larry Fitzpatrick, Ed Howard, Evelyn Snyder, BENICIA TEEN CLUB, Norman Sterling
Box Office	Adamo Music Center, Vallejo; Winters and Golla, Colver's Hardware, Benicia Antiques, Garnards Antiques, King Realty, Washington House Galleries, Alamo Galleries

Benicia Hall Gets Ready For Show

The Benicia Old Town group, in preparation for their dinner-theater production of "Anniversary Waltz" on November 13, 14 and 15 turned out a crew of 40 adults and teenagers to redecorate Benicia's historic I.D.E.S. Hall as the "Old Town Theater." Working under the direction of G. L. Ray, the group gave the 50 year old building its theater front in shades of gray, turquoise and gold. The building which was constructed in 1915 has been the scene of the Benicia Holy Ghost Festivals for many years.

Originally planned for only a two-night run, "Anniversary Waltz" will also be presented on Sunday evening, November 15. Tickets are available in limited numbers for opening night, November 13 and for November 15 by calling Benicia 745-0120 days or 745-0110 evenings.

Tickets may also be obtained at the Adamo Music Center, 814 Marin, in Vallejo. Tickets are \$5 for the dinner and theater. The dinner will be preceded by a no-host cocktail hour starting at 6 p.m. on Friday and Saturday and 4:30 p.m. on Sunday.

The cast of "Anniversary Waltz" is headed by Sally Mee and Gene Moretton and includes Rhea Leonard, Jimmy Clyma, Darlene Dickinson, Lester Hensley, Edith Lewis, Tom Colt, Brick Springer, Harry Bauer, Grace Bauer and Bob Winters.

Tickets On Sale For Play

Tickets are now on sale for the Benicia Old Town Group dinner-theater presentation "Anniversary Waltz", to be held November 13 and 14 at the Oldtown Theater in the IDES Hall.

Gene Moretton has been signed for the leading role in the play, a sophisticated comedy dealing with a young couple's 15th wedding anniversary and a few complications incident thereto. Moretton is a versatile performer who is equally at home acting or singing. While studying voice at the San Francisco Conservatory he attracted the attention of Ferde Grofe, which resulted in a contract for a television series produced by Mr. Grofe and parts in two motion pictures. He also worked with Mr. Grofe in several stage plays, including "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde".

The play will run two evenings, with a no-host cocktail hour commencing at 6 p.m., dinner at 7, and curtain time at 8:30. Admission is \$5.00 which includes both the dinner and play, and



Gene Moretton

Tickets may be obtained from Mrs. Thomas McKay, Old Town Group President, or at Cul Hardware, or at the office Winters, Winters & Golla. Information can be obtained by phoning 745-0120 during the day or Mrs. Michael Fitzgerald at 745-0110 in the evening.

Napa Register

Benicia Theatre

Three names well-known for their acting and directing in Pretenders' plays will be on deck at the new Benicia Old Town Theater when it opens Nov. 13-14 at the I.D.E.S. Hall there, First and J Streets, in "Anniversary Waltz." They are Bill Granger, director, Harry Bauer, producer, and Gene Moretton, who plays the lead. The program includes a no-host cocktail party on opening night at 6 p.m., dinner at 7 at nearby Rudy's and curtain rising time at 8:30. Call Benicia 745-0120 during the day or 745-0110 during the evening.

SOME VISITORS WHO SAW OLD TOWN "ANNIVERSARY WALTZ" PRODUCTION



Prior to the performance of "Anniversary Waltz," dinner was served patrons to the accompaniment of music by the Benicia High School Band. Tak-

ing their places at a table are Mr. and Mrs. William Case and their daughter, Kit, of Napa.



The Nov. 13 opening of "Anniversary Waltz," sponsored by the Old Town Group, proved a gala affair not only for Benicia but also for neighboring communities in Solano, Napa and

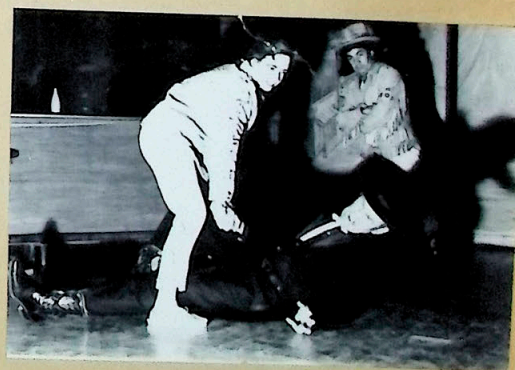
Contra Costa counties. Above, Mrs. Thomas Batchelor, left, greets Vallejoans Mrs. George Jones, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Barney and Jones to the play.



Mr. and Mrs. Byron Coan, of Vallejo, take a look at the program for "Anniversary Waltz," as musicians of the Benicia High School Band are shown in the background. The Old Town Group, producers of the theatrical, plan a similar venture in the spring.



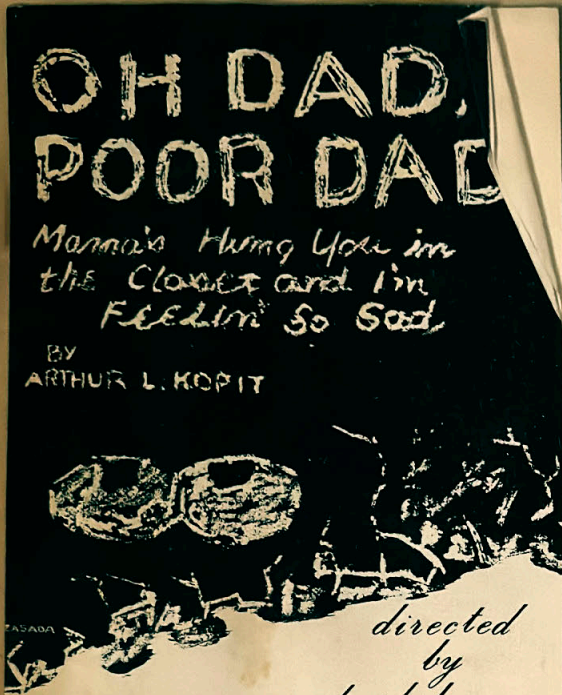
Mrs. Jeanne Spencer, standing, and Mr. and Mrs. Morris Chalmers were among the first-nighters at "Anniversary Waltz." The play, produced by the Benicia Old Town group at IDES Hall, is seated capacity through during its three-night run.



Bridget Villani
"Piano Annie"

FALL 1966

"OH DAD, POOR DAD, MAMA'S HUNG YOU IN THE CLOSET"



A TERRA LINDA LITTLE THEATRE
Production At
BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE
December 9 & 10, 1966

The Benician 12/6/66
OLD TOWN GROUP
SPONSOR "OH DAD"
DECEMBER 9 & 10

Benicia residents will have a chance to see the much discussed Arthur Kopit play, "Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mama's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad," on December 9 and 10.

Barbara Fugate, president of the Benicia Old Town Group, announces that a highly successful production of the play produced and directed by Karl Barron for the Terra Linda Little Theatre in Marin County, will be available for the two performances.

Miss Fugate said that a committee from the Old Town Group saw the Marin show several weeks ago and recommended it to a membership meeting last week, which voted to bring the play in as the first production at the Benicia Old Town Theatre for the 1966-67 season. The Old Town Group is planning to produce "Forty" an original play, in February.

The Terra Linda production of "Oh Dad" will be jointly sponsored by the Drama Department of Solano College, with members of the Old Town group giving technical aid. The I. D. E. S. Hall association has made the theatre available from December 7, at which time Barron and his technicians will be in town to set up the lighting and sets.

Included in the cast are Jessie Duffley, Valice Harder, Dave Minnich, and Art Zandza in leading roles. The entire company, numbering about a dozen, expects to stay overnight on Friday at the Alamo Colleges, where proprietor Richard Morris will make sleeping facilities available.

Reservations may be made by calling 745-0130, and tickets will be available at the door, priced at \$2.50, \$1.25 for students. Curtain time is 8:30 p.m.

Also in 1966 was the only sponsoring of a play by another group: Terra Linda Little Theatre's avant garde comedy, "Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mama's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad". The Cabaret Theatre evenings were sponsored jointly by the Benicia Old Town Players and the Solano College Drama Department.

'Poor Dad' In Benicia

The first Northbay production of Arthur Kopit's comedy of the absurd "Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mama's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad" will play at the Benicia Old Town Theatre Friday and Saturday nights, December 9 and 10 with a cast of Marin County's top actors.

Karl Barron, who produced and directed the show for the Terra Linda Little Theatre, says "We were lucky to get the best people available in Marin for this show. It's unbelievable how well each actor fits his role."

Playing Madame Rosepettle, the strange woman who carries her husband in his coffin along on her travels, is Jessie Duffley, Miss Duffley, head of the language department at San Rafael High School. She says "I wasn't sure at first, but now after playing this kooky woman for weeks, I'm mad about the part—and the play."

"Oh Dad" is being brought to Benicia under sponsorship of the Benicia Old Town Group, which produces plays throughout the season.

Tickets will be available at the doors of the theatre, 140 West Jay St., Benicia and reservations may be made by phoning 745-0130. Curtain time is 8:30 and the Old Town Group will serve refreshments during intermission.

Fairfield Republic Dec. 8, 1966 Broadway Hit in Benicia

The Benicia Old Town Group and the Drama Department of Solano College will be hosts December 9 and 10, in a highly successful Marin County production of Arthur Kopit's Broadway hit "Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mama's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad."

Barbara Fugate, president of the Old Town Group, said a committee saw the show in Ignacio several weeks ago and contracted to bring it to the Benicia Old Town Theatre when its Marin run concluded.

"We were so impressed with this production, produced and directed by Karl Barron for the

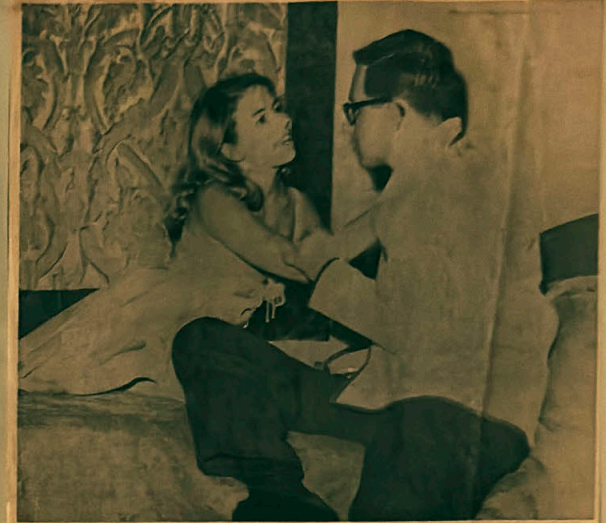
Terra Linda Little Theatre," Miss Fugate said. "That we decided it would make a fine opener for our current season. We plan to produce Gerard A. Larson's original play "Forty" in February, but feel that the theatre should not be dark until then. Hence this striking comedy of the absurd by Harvard professor Kopit."

"Barron will come to Benicia on December 7 to begin work on sets and lights," she said. "We hope to have a large turnout on both nights. The Old Town Group will serve refreshments at intermission, but the play will not be done in cabaret style as we have done our melodramas."

Tickets at \$2.50 (students \$1.25) are available by phoning 745-0130 and will be sold at the door on performance nights. Curtain is at 8:30 p.m.

Vallejo Times-Herald

SOLANO AND NAPA COUNTY'S MORNING NEWSPAPER
THIRD SECTION VALLEJO, CALIF.—FRIDAY, DEC. 9, 1966 PAGE 19



Valice Harder tries to persuade Dave Minnich to "change to something more comfortable" in "Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mama's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad." The comedy of the absurd plays at Benicia Old Town Theatre tonight and Saturday night at 8:30.

Comedy Will Open In Benicia Tonight

BENICIA — The Old Town Group and the drama department of Solano College will be hosts tonight and Saturday night to the Marin County production of "Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mama's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad."

Curtain time will be at 8:30 p.m. both nights of the show, and tickets are \$2.50 for adults; \$1.25 for students.

Barbara Fugate, president of the Old Town Group, said a committee saw the play several weeks ago in Ignacio, and contracted to bring it to the Benicia Theatre when its Marin run ended.

The play, an absurd comedy by Arthur Kopit, a professor at Harvard University, has been produced and directed by Karl Barron, a 35-year stage veteran.

"We were so impressed with this production that we decided it would make a fine opening attraction for our current season," Miss Fugate said.

"We plan to produce an original play, "Forty," in February, but feel that our theatre should not be dark until then. That is why we asked the Marin group here."

The Old Town Group will serve refreshments at intermissions, but the play will not be done cabaret style, in the manner of other Old Town presentations.

The leading role in the comedy, that of Madame Rosepettle, an eccentric who carries the remains of her husband in a coffin as she travels, is played by Jessie Duffley, head of the language department at San Rafael High School.

Others in the cast are Valice Harder, Dave Minnich, Art Zandza, Bob Eldred, Lou Mason, Rick Burris and Claude Montoya.

FORTY DINNER THEATRE

sponsored by the Benicia Old Town Group & Solano College

Fridays & Saturdays

April 21 & 22

& 28 & 29

May 5 & 6

tickets: 5.00

Winters, Winters & Coan 745-0130

Benicia 5, 10 & 15 & Store

Lasailles Rug & Upholstery 643-8024

Redwood Inn

In 1967, "Forty" was unique in two ways: it was the first public production of a new play, by an instructor at Sacramento State, and was the only time an acting role was played by its director. Charles T. McDermon, drama instructor at Solano College, directed six Benicia Theatre-Solano College plays and one summer drama school between 1964 and 1969.

The Benicia Old Town Group and Solano College Drama Department

jointly present

"FORTY"

by Dr. Gerard A. Larson

Directed by
CHARLES T. McDERMON

April 21, 22, 28, 29

May 5, 6

Benicia Old Town Theatre
140 West J Street, Benicia

Spring 1967

Vallejo Times-Herald Old Town Group's Play Wins Praise

By FRANCIS FLAHERTY

BENICIA — The Old Town Group, which does "something different" every time it presents a theatrical, did it again last night, and the group's production of "Forty" resounds handsomely in its credit.

"Forty," an original play by Dr. Gerard A. Larson, of Sacramento State College, was seen by fewer people than it should have been, for the weather, but the weather and the fact a competing stage play was running in Vallejo doubtless had something to do with the turnout.

Things almost certainly will get better as the word is passed on about this production. Theatergoers will have ample opportunity to take it in, since the play continues not only tonight, but on the two succeeding weekends, April 28 and 29; May 5 and 6.

"Forty" is a play that might have been written, but wasn't, to meet the unique staging problems encountered in the old IREB Hall, where space is at such a premium it is vital to account for every square foot, then use the stairways and wings for overture.

LIFETIME LOSER

The plot concerns a lifetime loser, Larry, who upon reaching his 40th birthday, suddenly decides to face reality. Briefly, they run away from it.

He's got a wife, two college-age sons, along with the usual marriage and other accretions of married life. He also has a dependent maiden aunt, and a well-to-do sister and brother-in-law.

He finds everyone of them irksome, to the point that any face to face discussion for himself would be more than escape.

Larry gets his job — his birthday wish — in the good life, and then finds it's the good life, too, of all responsibilities.

Larry's role at giving weight to his production gives everyone concerned opportunity to do their bit, to the audience.

on his particular view of the problem posed by Larry, including the protagonist himself.

A lot of funny lines are there, with general, and there are a lot more in the regular dialogue. The play ends on a sad note; but it was predictable. Larry is sweet-talked into going back to his old job as major-domo of a depot, information desk, and one man's family is restored to its former slightly uneasy keel.

Charles McDermon, drama coach at Solano College, not only directed the cast, but also played the lead role with finesse and fire in equal amounts.

As a matter of fact, the whole cast came through nobly. We were impressed with the youngsters — Pamela Archibald (who wouldn't be); Bob Riker and Bob Kutz, who played the sons. The above quartet represents Solano College's contributions.

WAS EFFECTIVE

Mary Ann Winters couldn't have been kinder, nor more effective as the put-up aunt, who is more sympathetic than most to Larry and his attempts to realize his dreams.

There are two realists — Barbara Chandler, as Larry's wife, and Norma Sharon, as her sister. Mrs. Chandler manages very easily to convey her feelings as the wife who has sacrificed everything, and for what? And Miss Sharon comes on so well as to be somewhat of a surprise, since this marks her first appearance with the Old Towners.

A great share of the hilarity of "Forty" is reserved to near the end when Tom (Gale Mr. Pomponi himself) and Genevieve (Conrad) as his spouse, arrive at Larry's beach cottage to talk him into resuming his little dream and coming back to work.

Ben Johnson, an Old Town Group veteran, does his unenviable job to make his strong character a real one. The production was presented as an evening of dinner and theatre, and the food was tasty and plentiful.

OLD TOWN GROUP TO PRESENT PLAY IN APRIL AND MAY

Final dates for the Benicia Old Town group's presentation of dinner-theatre have been set as Friday and Saturday, April 21 and 22, and Friday and Saturday, May 6 and 7.

"Forty," a comedy by Gerald A. Larson, has been cast and is in production. Diane Johnson, general production manager, has crews working evenings and week ends on the set and props.

Cast members from Benicia include: Mary Ann Winters, Ron Johnson, Norma Sharon and Gen Conrad.

The play is co-sponsored by the Benicia Old Town Group and Solano College. Charles McDermon, instructor in dramatics, is directing "Forty" and also plays the role of a man just turned forty.

The dinner will be catered by Claude Settle of the Redwood Inn.

Tickets are available at Fitz-Gerald's Hardware and Winters, Winters & Coan, phone 745-0130.

Old Town's Next Play Offers Unique Theater

The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group and the drama department of Solano Junior College have merged talents for a venture into creative theater. The Benicians have offered their experience and facilities, and Charles McDermon, drama instructor, has been able to combine them with the school's curriculum. Members of the drama class have been traveling to Benicia three times a week to gain experience in an actual theater production, both as cast members and in set construction and decoration, lighting, special effects, properties, and all the other areas involved in play production.

The play, "Forty," a comedy written by Gerard A. Larson of Sacramento State College, has several unusual features in technique and in audience involvement. Another rarity is that the director also is the leading man. McDermon was drafted as the

male lead by the other members of the cast and crew and now the Benicia audience will be able to see the man who has directed previous Benicia presentations. Dates for the dinner-theatre are Friday and Saturday, April 21 and 22, April 28 and 29, and May 5 and 6. No-host cocktail hour will start at 6:30 p.m. preceding dinner catered by Claude Settle of the Redwood Inn. Tickets are available at the Benicia, 5, 10 & 15c Store, at Winters, Winters & Coan, and by phoning 745-0130. In Vallejo, tickets are available through Luminis Rug and Upholstery, 645-3024.

The regular meeting of the Benicia Old Town Group was held last Friday at the Ron Johnson's home.

Committee chairmen for the house committees, hostesses, programs, decorations, etc., were appointed by general chairman Diane Johnson. Work committee chairmen Ron Johnson, set construction, and Phyllis Malicki, properties, reported that everything was going smoothly in preparation for the three week run. Larry FitzPatrick, liaison to Claude Settle of the Redwood Inn,

After the meeting, volunteers spent the rest of the evening reading "mailers" to be sent to the patrons of the previous dinner-theatre evenings who had signed the mailing list.

THE NEWS-CHRONICLE

PAGE 9 VALLEJO, CALIFORNIA—FRIDAY, APRIL 28, 1967 NO. 209



HOSTESSES AWAIT THEATER-GOERS

These four women are members of the hostess committee selected to greet audiences attending the spring production of the Benicia Old Town Players and Solano College drama department which will be presented again tonight and Saturday in Benicia. The group's current play is "Forty," a comedy

Last Night Due For Play

BENICIA—One final performance of the popular play, "Forty," a joint production of the Solano College Drama Department and the Benicia Old Town Players, will be given Saturday night, May 13, at the Benicia Old Town Theatre under the sponsorship of the Solano College Circle K Club and the Suburban Kiwanis Club. No dinner will be served in connection with this one performance.

Special prices for this presentation will be \$2.50 for adults and \$1 for students. Tickets may be obtained from members of the Circle K or Suburban Kiwanis Club or from the Solano College Student Store.

The play is directed by Charles McDermon of the college drama department, who also plays the leading role. He is assisted by several of his students in drama plus some of the outstanding performers of the Benicia Old Town Players.

Daily Transcript (Concord)

Audiences Approve Comedy in Benicia

By MARVA SINGLAI

Editor's note: A great many Diablo Area residents look forward to attending the supper presentations of the Benicia Old Town Players; local little theatre enthusiasts often are crowded in the cast. Because we were unable to review the presentation, we asked Concord's Marva Singlai to send us her opinion of the production. Mrs. Singlai's review follows:

Those in Concord who have participated in Old Town Players' productions in the past will be pleased to note that "Forty," an experimental production presented for three consecutive weekends at the Old Town Theatre in Benicia, attracted interested viewers and good comments.

Written by Dr. Gerard A. Larson of Sacramento State College, and presented in collaboration with Solano Jr. College drama department, "Forty" is a comedy which has a very poignant theme running throughout. A man with two college-age sons, a wife, and a maiden aunt dependent, reaches his fortieth birthday and suddenly realizes that life is passing him by. He decides to kick over the traces, and begins by quitting his job. His position among family members, relatives, and friends immediately alters radically, and many hilarious as well as some pathetic situations arise out of his decision.

Larry, the protagonist, was magnificently done by Charles T. McDermon, who also directed the entire production. Mr. McDermon is drama coach at Solano College. He brought this part so alive that the viewer had every opportunity to realize just what this stage of life can be like for one who has been stuck for many years in a job he has detested. Barbara Chandler was quite convincing as the distraught wife, Gloria, who reverses her position in life to become the pampered, leisurely, non-productive housewife in retaliation for the outrage she feels she has suffered.

Aunt Mame was superbly done by Attorney Mary Ann Winters. Though seeming to lack a few of her marbles, row and then Aunt Mame comes up with real sense of wisdom. She was a fitting mixture of naive and ability for frank appraisal of a difficult situation.

Larry and Gloria's sons, Benjamin and Franklin, played by Bob Kutz and Bob Riker of Solano College, were complete opposites, and wrangled throughout the production. In the last scene they managed to come to their brotherly understanding. Benjamin, the perennial athlete, was continually developing his physical prowess almost to the exclusion of all other normal interests; while Franklin was just as intent on his books. These two completed this typical metropolitan family.

Candy is a sweet and clever little dish, expertly played by Pamela Archibald. Though very young, she knew how to draw the males' attention and keep it centered on herself.

Tony, the brother-in-law, was extremely well done by Ron Johnson. In the first act his slightly drunken scenes were so persuasive that one

can almost smell the aroma of Scotch.

Well, Tony's wife, who played by Norma Sharon, Norma deserves special plaudits for carrying through the first act in a role which is the hardest to play. It required substance in the second act, however, and she continued to do it more than justice. This was Norma's first experience in little theatre, and she played her part with assurance.

A most pleasant surprise near the end of the second act was the appearance of Ben and Mrs. Pendleton, played by Tom Calt and Genevieve Conrad. These players, who had been in the first act, for a few minutes during their previous on-stage, one left a void in the audience. The change from the old "little theatre" to something with more content, we understand, is an old hand at it. Being experimental, the play has elicited curiosity of a wide group of theatergoers. The response, actually, is a most effective element in having characters so convincing.

This type of theater, which seems to draw upon the audience for some response, actually is more like first-hand view of real-life scenes.

The second device used by author Dr. Larson, was the entrance of Mr. and Mrs. Pendleton from the audience to onstage. It was startling, but not distracting.

As one young viewer heard to say, "It is difficult to think that as they call right stage they are not going into a kitchen, as say they are."

The set was very well planned, and the dinner was deliciously hot and tasty. The service excellent. All in all, the Old Town Players and the drama department of Solano College, specifically Charles McDermon, deserve much credit for an unusual and entertaining production.

SPRING 1967 "FORTY"

Friday Show Tickets Left

BENICIA — Saturday's closing performance of "Forty," the spring production of the Benicia Old Town Players and Solano College drama department, is sold out but a number of tickets still are available for Friday's show.

They may be obtained at the Redwood Inn or Lasalle's Rug and Upholstery Shop in Vallejo or by phoning Benicia 745-0130 or 745-5325.

The performance begins with a no-host cocktail hour at 6:30 p.m., followed by a catered dinner and the presentation of the comedy by Dr. Gerard Larson.





JAN 1968

"OUR TOWN"

1968

OUR TOWN

"BY THORNTON WILDER"

PRODUCED BY THE
SOLANO COLLEGE DRAMA
DEPARTMENT AND
THE BENICIA OLD
TOWN GROUP



DIRECTED BY
C. T. McDERMON

The next two plays, "Our Town" in 1968 and "The Time of Your Life" in 1969, were productions of well-known and well-liked 'classics' for three weekends of Friday Ice Cream Parlour and Saturday Dinner Theatre evenings. In fact, "The Time of Your Life" did so well that it was held over for a fourth Dinner Theatre evening. Later in the Spring, the Old Town Theatre Group sponsored an afternoon of children's ballet, "Hansel and Gretel" done by the Nell Dennis School of Benicia.

Tryouts Sunday For 'Our Town'

Benicia Herald Jan. 14, 1968
Auditions for the Benicia Old Town Group play, "Our Town," will begin at 1 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 14, in the IDES Hall, 140 West J St.

Times-Herald Dec. 7, 1967 JC To Stage Wilder Play

"Our Town," the Pulitzer prize-winning play by Thornton Wilder, will be the next production of the Solano College Drama Department combined with the talents of the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group. Charles T. McDermott, speech and drama instructor at the college, has announced.

First presentation will be for students only on Friday and Saturday evenings, Jan. 5 and 6. Performance Jan. 12 and 13 will be for the general public. Dinner will be catered before the raising of the curtain in the Old Town Playhouse Hall in Benicia. There may be additional performances Jan. 19 and 20.

The cast: Stage Manager — Bob Winters; Emily Webb — Beverly Erickson; George Gibbs — Bob Kirtz; Mrs. Webb — Mary Ann Waters; Mr. Webb — Ed Kirtz; Mr. Gibbs — Jan Conrad; Dr. Gibbs — Doug Nelson; Mrs. Gibbs — Bridget Villani; Simon — Simon Roy; Peter — Peter Newman; Frank — Frank Newman; George — George Newman; John — John Newman; Harold — Harold Newman; including Robbie Larson, Michael Boyd, president, and Ken Faley, vice president, will play minor roles in the production.

VALLEJO, CALIF.—FRIDAY, JAN. 12, 1968



"OUR TOWN" TONIGHT

Box office opens at 7:30 p.m. today and curtain time is 8:30 for the production of "Our Town" in Benicia's IDES Hall. Tonight's play will feature an Ice Cream Soda Parlor theater and a dinner theater, entered by Claude Settle of the Redwood Inn. The play will be presented Saturday by reservation only. Bob Kirtz, left, and Beverly Erickson portray the young lovers in Thornton Wilder's prize-winning American classic. The play is a joint effort of the Benicia Old Town Group and the drama department at Solano Junior College. The same production will be offered on the weekends of Jan. 19-20 and 26-27.

College Plans Benicia Play

Many of the problems of Charles McDermott, instructor in drama at Solano College, will vanish into thin air in just a few years when the new campus of the college is completed on Suisun Valley Road near Rockville. Inasmuch as the plans for the new college include a modern theater for stage productions.

Meanwhile, McDermott, his drama students at the college and members of the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group are continuing to cope with the many problems they always face in preparing a play for presentation in the IDES Hall in Benicia. The next presentation is Thornton Wilder's "Our Town," which is scheduled for two and possibly three weekend presentations in January.

According to present plans, there will be a special appearance Jan. 5 and 6 without dinner for students only. Then the play will be given Jan. 12 and 13 with a catered dinner in the hall for the general public. The play may also be repeated Jan. 19 and 20 with dinner. McDermott has announced. Admission charges will be announced shortly.

In a hall never designed for theater productions, members of the play staff are gradually solving the problems of lighting and settings so that realistic rehearsal may be held.

Times-Herald Jan. 4, 1968



In this "Our Town" scene, Father Webb convinces his daughter, Emily, to go ahead and get married to her childhood beau, Ed Kirtz. Kirtz portrays Webb and Beverly Erickson is Emily in the play which will feature in Benicia during the next three weekends. Play characters in the background, left to right, Maryann Winters, Bob Winters and Gen Conrad. The production is a joint effort of the Solano College Drama Department and the Benicia Old Town Group.

Wilder's Classic Simple But Strong

By FRANCIS FLAHERTY

BENICIA — Thornton Wilder's beloved classic, "Our Town," was staged with aplomb and verve — the latter a bit in excess — over the weekend by the Old Town Group, which received a noble assist from the Solano College Drama Department.

There is a gnawing doubt here whether the terms "aplomb" and "verve" are compatible. There also exists some uneasiness as to whether the Old Town Group can continue to function without much in the way of stage or sets.

"Our Town," of course, required nothing more than a stage big enough to accommodate at one time or another, 38 of the 39 people involved in the presentation, with only a handful of these called on for speaking parts.

The Wilder play thus must have occasioned contradictory ideas among the spectators, some finding it puzzlingly boring; others viewing the action as a theatrical delight, particularly since the only encumbrances were costumes and the most austere of props, if they were that.

"Our Town" is one of those stories so beautifully simple — Wilder wrote it in the 30s — that the Elmer Rice, Laurence Stallings, and maybe even the O'Neills — must have wondered why they didn't think of doing it first.

It's merely about a little town in New Hampshire, a village that might just as well have been in Kansas or the State of Washington or anywhere else in the Union, for that matter. And the only story line concerns the lives, loves and deaths of the inhabitants.

They could be more interesting people, but in this instance the whole is of greater importance than the sum of its parts. That's why only a handful of the sizable cast is charged with the responsibility of carrying the play.

Chief among them are Robert Winters, the "stage manager," a role made famous by the late Frank Craven, and Beverly Erickson, the lovely and tragic heroine of the play.

Winters, who speaks from ground level below stage center, actually outlines the action that is about to transpire on stage.

The lines might be dismissed as "gossip" outside the theater; actually they are not. The stage manager is merely talking about the "doings" in "Our Town" as he recorded them in his memory around the turn of the century.

Miss Erickson's crystal-clear voice comes over beautifully, but through no fault of hers there appears to be a gap in the story she is supposed to be enacting, since the only encumbrances were costumes and the most austere of props, if they were that.

The death of Emily, of course, reflects all the poignancy of "Our Town," but Wilder prevents emotions from running amok, by bringing back with her, other departed citizens of the hamlet who bear their a morpheus state with equanimity, if not with relief.

As we mentioned, Miss Erickson was ethereal in her role, and our only critical observation of Winters would be that he appears to declaim a bit too swiftly, not as if he were carefully choosing his words as a New England might be expected to do.

It's a triumph for the Old Town Group and the Solano College Drama Department, it has been done well, no one intended. His ingenuity shines through here.

For the former view will only the former view will be a role theater — or vehicles — IDES Hall can accommodate a play will be presented two weekends, with the Old Town Group's traditional dinner-theater featured Saturdays, Jan. 19 and 27.



'Our Town' In Benicia 3 Weekends

"Our Town," Thornton Wilder's Pulitzer Prize winning American classic, will feature in Benicia the weekends of Jan. 12-13, 19-20 and 26-27.

Charles T. McDermott, head of the Solano College Drama Department, is directing the Solano College-Benicia Old Town Group joint production. The play opens Friday for a special student performance at the Benicia Old Town Theater (IDES Hall) on West J Street.

Friday nights, Jan. 12, 19 and 26, will feature an Ice Cream Soda Parlor theater. Box office opens at 7:30 and curtain time is 8:30 p.m. Ice cream specialties, in keeping with the period of the play, will be offered for sale. Tickets are \$2.50 for adults, \$1.50 with studentbody cards and children 50 cents.

Dinner Theater on Saturday nights will be catered by Claude Settle of the Redwood Inn. Tickets for dinner and the show are \$5, including tax. Bar items are separate. Cocktails will be served at 6 p.m., dinner at 7 p.m. and curtain time at 8:30 p.m. The Saturday night theater will be by reservations only.

Reservations and Friday night tickets may be obtained at Munter Music, 501 Georgia St., Vallejo; Continental Business Equipment, 800 School St., Napa, 255-1080; Wold's Benicia 5, 10 and 15 Store, First Street; Winters, Winters and Coan, 745-0130, Benicia, and through members of the cast and the Benicia Old Town Group.

Benicia Old Town GROUP TO PRESENT PLAY IN JANUARY

Benicia Old Town Group Theatre and the Solano College Drama department will present the joint production of the American classic by Thornton Wilder, "Our Town," at the Benicia Old Town Theatre (I. D. E. S. Hall) Friday and Saturday nights during January.

January 5th, Solano College Circle K Club sponsors the play with "Student Night." Tickets will be available on Campus at Solano College or from Circle K members.

On the following weekends, Jan. 12 and 13, 19 and 20, and 26 and 27, Friday nights will feature Ice Cream Socials. On sale will be ice cream, floats, and fancy ice cream of the turn of the century. Doors open at 7:30, curtain time 8:30. Tickets: \$2.50 for adults, \$1.00 with studentbody cards, and children \$50.

Dinner Theatre on Saturday nights will again be catered by Claude Settle of the Redwood Inn. Tickets for dinner and show are \$5.00, including tax. Bar items are separate. Dinner at 6:30, curtain time 8:30. Dinner tickets will be by reservations only. Reservations may be made at Winters, Winters and Coan, phone 745-0130.

Charles McDermott, head of the Solano College Drama Department, directs a cast of over 40 Solano College students and Benicia Old Town Group members.

The cast is headed by Robert Winters, Benicia attorney, playing the stage manager, who narrates the play; Beverly Erickson, a Solano College student, who plays Emily, the heroine; and Bob Kirtz, also a Solano College student, who plays George Gibbs, Emily's boy friend and husband.

They are supported by Doug Nelson as Dr. Gibbs, Gen Conrad as Mrs. Gibbs, Maryann Winters as Mrs. Webb, Ed Kirtz as Mr. Webb, Emily's father, Bob Riker as Simon Stimson, John Wickham as Constable Warren, and Frank Pendle as Howie Newman.

Three more supporting actors of special interest are the Villani-Bridget Villani, her daughter Jodie and her son Harvey.

Of many faces, will be a great performance. Soames, the town gossip, has played with the Benicia Old Town Group many times, as well as many other groups, saying such roles as the Death Witch in "Dennis and the Witches" and Plana Annie in "Deadwood Dick." Bridget's son, Harvey plays Willie Webb and daughter Jodie plays Rebecca Gibbs.

In a hall never designed for theater productions, members of the play staff are gradually solving the problems of lighting and settings so that realistic rehearsal may be held.

Benicia Herald Jan. 4, 1968



In this scene from "Our Town" to be presented Friday and Saturday in IDES Hall, Father Webb (Ed Kirtz) convinces his daughter, Emily (Beverly Erickson) to go ahead and get married to her childhood beau. The production, which also will be given the weekends of Jan. 19-20 and 26-27, is a joint effort of the Solano Junior College drama department and the Benicia Old Town Group.

Benicia Old Town's 'Our Town' Play To Show On Weekend

"Our Town," Thornton Wilder's Pulitzer prize winning American classic, will be presented by the Benicia Old Town Group on Friday and Saturday, Jan. 12-13, in IDES Hall.

The same production also will be offered on the weekends of Jan. 19-20 and 26-27. It is a joint effort by the Old Town Group and the drama department at Solano Junior College.

Charles T. McDermott, head of the drama department, is directing this play which will feature

Friday nights, Jan. 12, 19 and 26, will feature an Ice Cream Soda Parlor theater. Box office opens at 7:30 and curtain time is 8:30 p.m. Ice cream specialties, in keeping with the period of the play, will be offered for sale.

Dinner Theater on Saturday nights will be catered by Claude Settle of the Redwood Inn. Cocktails will be served at 6 p.m., dinner at 7 p.m. and curtain time at 8:30 p.m. The Saturday night theater will be by reservations only.

Reservations and Friday night tickets may be obtained at Munter Music, 501 Georgia St., Vallejo; Continental Business Equipment, 800 School St., Napa, 255-1080; Wold's Benicia 5, 10 and 15 Store, First Street; Winters, Winters and Coan, 745-0130, Benicia, and through members of the cast and the Benicia Old Town Group.

Times-Herald Jan. 14, 1968

Wilder's Classic Simple But Strong

By FRANCIS FLAHERTY

BENICIA — Thornton Wilder's beloved classic, "Our Town," was staged with aplomb and verve — the latter a bit in excess — over the weekend by the Old Town Group, which received a noble assist from the Solano College Drama Department.

There is a gnawing doubt here whether the terms "aplomb" and "verve" are compatible. There also exists some uneasiness as to whether the Old Town Group can continue to function without much in the way of stage or sets.

"Our Town," of course, required nothing more than a stage big enough to accommodate at one time or another, 38 of the 39 people involved in the presentation, with only a handful of these called on for speaking parts.

The Wilder play thus must have occasioned contradictory ideas among the spectators, some finding it puzzlingly boring; others viewing the action as a theatrical delight, particularly since the only encumbrances were costumes and the most austere of props, if they were that.

"Our Town" is one of those stories so beautifully simple — Wilder wrote it in the 30s — that the Elmer Rice, Laurence Stallings, and maybe even the O'Neills — must have wondered why they didn't think of doing it first.

It's merely about a little town in New Hampshire, a village that might just as well have been in Kansas or the State of Washington or anywhere else in the Union, for that matter. And the only story line concerns the lives, loves and deaths of the inhabitants.

They could be more interesting people, but in this instance the whole is of greater importance than the sum of its parts. That's why only a handful of the sizable cast is charged with the responsibility of carrying the play.

Chief among them are Robert Winters, the "stage manager," a role made famous by the late Frank Craven, and Beverly Erickson, the lovely and tragic heroine of the play.

Winters, who speaks from ground level below stage center, actually outlines the action that is about to transpire on stage.

The lines might be dismissed as "gossip" outside the theater; actually they are not. The stage manager is merely talking about the "doings" in "Our Town" as he recorded them in his memory around the turn of the century.

Miss Erickson's crystal-clear voice comes over beautifully, but through no fault of hers there appears to be a gap in the story she is supposed to be enacting, since the only encumbrances were costumes and the most austere of props, if they were that.

The death of Emily, of course, reflects all the poignancy of "Our Town," but Wilder prevents emotions from running amok, by bringing back with her, other departed citizens of the hamlet who bear their a morpheus state with equanimity, if not with relief.

As we mentioned, Miss Erickson was ethereal in her role, and our only critical observation of Winters would be that he appears to declaim a bit too swiftly, not as if he were carefully choosing his words as a sage of New England might be expected to do.

It's a triumph for the Old Town Group and the Solano College Drama Department, it has been done well, no one intended. His ingenuity shines through here.

For the former view will only the former view will be a role theater — or vehicles — IDES Hall can accommodate a play will be presented two weekends, with the Old Town Group's traditional dinner-theater featured Saturdays, Jan. 19 and 27.

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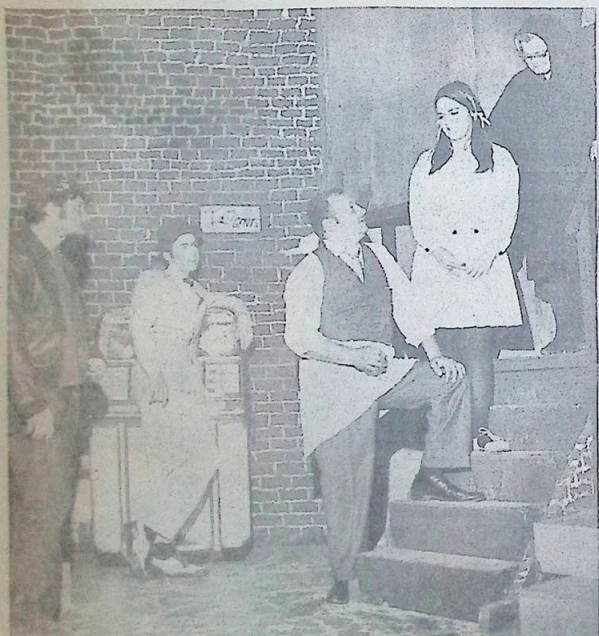
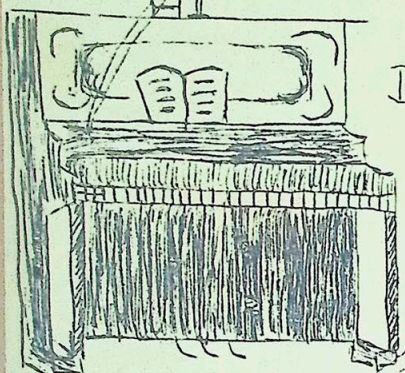
In a hall never designed for theater productions, members of the play staff are gradually solving the problems of lighting and settings so that realistic rehearsal may be held.

The same schedule will be in effect next weekend when the play closes.

The play will be presented two weekends, with the Old Town Group's traditional dinner-theater featured Saturdays, Jan. 19 and 27.

January 1969

Time of Your Life
by William Saroyan
Solano College
Drama Department
and The Benicia Old Town
Theater Group
Directed by
Charles T. McDermion



The aura of a San Francisco waterfront saloon is captured by performers who make up the cast of William Saroyan's play "The Time of Your Life" which may be seen the weekends of Jan. 17-18 and 24-25 at the Old Town Theatre in Benicia, 140 West J St. Included in the cast are, left to right, John Wickham as "Arab," a melancholy and

tactful old man; Jeff Bryant as "Harry," a would-be dancer who wants to make people happy; Marvin (Bitchy) Ceresa as "Nick," the bartender who owns the honkytonk around whom the play revolves; Janice Rae Hoover as "Anna," Nick's daughter, and Betty McCabe as "Nick's Ma." — Times-Herald Photo. 1-15-69 T.H.



'TIME OF YOUR LIFE' IN BENICIA RUN

Twenty-seven characters with assorted problems come to life in William Saroyan's "The Time of Your Life" which will feature in Benicia on Friday and Saturday, Jan. 24-25, at the Old Town Theatre, 140 West J St. The play is a joint production of the Solano College Drama Department and the Old Town Theatre Group. Leading roles are portrayed by Norma Sharon as "Kitty,"

Get ready for

"THE TIME OF YOUR LIFE"

William Saroyan's comedy about the inhabitants of Nick's Pacific Street Saloon, Restaurant and Entertainment Palace

Dinner Theatre	January 11	18	25
Soda Parlor Theatre	January 10	17	24

Presented by

The Benicia Old Town Group
and
Solano College Drama Department
at
The Benicia Old Town Theatre

Directed by
Charles T. McDermion

Dinner Theatre:

All tickets \$5.00
(includes tax & tip)
cocktails (no host) 6:30
dinner 7:30
curtain 8:30

Soda Parlor Theatre:

Admission
Adults \$2.50
Students 1.50
Children 1.00
box office opens at 7:30
curtain 8:30

for ticket information
phone 745-0130 or 745-3325



The roughness of old Indian fighter "Kit Carson" portrayed by Frank Pendle, seated left, in this scene from William Saroyan's "The Time of Your Life," bristles "Society Lady" Bridget Villanti. Nick the bartender, owner of the San Francisco saloon which is the setting for the drama, is characterized by Solano College student Marvin Ceresa, standing right. His piano playing pal Willie is Jeff Boyle, standing left. All the characters come to life in the prize-winning play scheduled Jan. 10-11, 17-18 and 24-25 at the Old Town Theatre in Benicia. — Times-Herald Photo. 1-9-69 T.H.

"In the time of your life, live so that in that wondrous time you shall not add to the misery and sorrow of the world, but shall smile to the infinite delight and mystery of it."

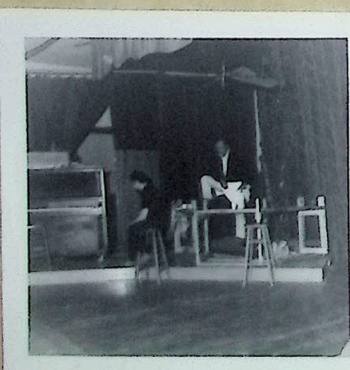
William Saroyan

JAN 1969
"THE TIME
OF YOUR
LIFE"



Leading roles in the play, "The Time of Your Life" by William Saroyan, are characterized by, left to right, Norma Sharon as "Kitty Duval," Marvin Ceresa as "Nick" the bartender, and Spencer Dawson as "Joe." The play is a joint production of the

Solano College Drama Department and the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group. Performances are scheduled in Benicia the last three weekends in January. — Times-Herald Photo. 1-2-69 T.H.



FALL 1969

"THE TAVERN"

BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE, 140 WEST "J" ST. (I.D.E.S. Hall)
November 28, 29 December 5, 6 December 12, 13

The Solano College Department and The Benicia Old Town Group JOINTLY PRESENT

"The Tavern"

by George M. Cohan

Directed by
CHARLES T. McDERMON

Assistant Director
MISTRESS SUSAN RAE SCOTT

General Chairman
MME. GENEVIEVE COONRADT

DRAMATIS PERSONAE (in order of appearance)

ZACH	MASTER DENNIS MULLIGAN
SALLY	MISTRESS CHRISTINE WELLINS
FREEMAN	MISTER ROBERT K. WINTERS
WILLUM	MASTER ARNOLD HAMILTON
VAGABOND	MISTER SPENCER DAWSON
VIOLET	MADAME NORMA SHARON
GOVERNOR LAMSON	MISTER JAMES KELLEHER
MRS. LAMSON	MADAME MARY VICKERS
VIRGINIA LAMSON	MISTRESS MELISSA PRITCHETT
TOM ALLEN	MISTER TIM GORELANGTON
SHERIFF	MISTER PAT BRENNAN
SHERIFF'S MAN, EZRA	MISTER WILLIAM HATFIELD
SHERIFF'S MAN, JOSHUA	MISTER J. EUGENE BOYLE
ATTENDANT STEVENS	MISTER L. B. MARTI
PIANIST	ONEITA (Fingers) FEENEY
PROMPTER (if needed)	SUSAN RAE SCOTT

PLEASE REFRAIN FROM THROWING MONEY!!!

OLIO POTPOURRI

CHARLOTTE PRUITT	GEORGE M. COHAN MEDLEY
THELMA BATCHELOR	NAUGHTY NURSE

AND OTHER SURPRISE ACTS

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

Somewhere an Early American Past

ACT II

Two hours later Somewhere—An Early American Past
LADIES, PLEASE REMOVE YOUR HATS!!!

Benicia Old Town Group To Present 2-Act Melodrama

George M. Cohan's Robert Winters of Benicia plays swashbuckling melodrama "The Tavern" will be presented soon. Freeman, Norman Sharon, as Benicia Old Town Group and of America, plays the role of Solano College Drama Department, a mental hospital.

The two-act play, which the Spencer Dawson, well-known chutes an act of mystery, is a local theater goes, is cast directed by Charles T. McDermott as the Vagabond. Cohan wrote drama department.

The entertainment will be Dennis Mulligan as Zach, three consecutive Fridays and Arnold Hamilton as Willum, Saturdays, Nov. 28 and 29, Dec. James Kelleher as Governor, 5 and 6 and Dec. 12 and 13. Lamson, Mary Vickers as a An also will be featured between Mrs. Lamson, Melissa Pritchett acts as an added attraction.

The plot revolves around Gorelangton as Tom Allen, Pat unexpected guests who seek shelter in the Sheriff, William shelter in the tavern or way Hatfield as the Sheriff's Man, station on a stormy night. Abby and Leslie Marti as Attendant Stevens.

Tickets may be obtained at the Muntz Music Co. in Vallejo, 643-5427; Benicia Stationery, 745-2576; the Winters and Winters Law Office in Benicia, 745-0130, or from members of the Benicia Old Town Group.

Admission includes the 7 p.m. catered dinner and the play at 8:30 p.m. A 6 p.m. no-host cocktail hour precedes the dinner. Tax and tip are included in the admission price.

The Benicia Old Town Theatre is located at 140 West J St.



Unexpected guests who seek shelter in "The Tavern" on a stormy night contribute to the plot of the entertaining melodrama planned soon as a joint effort of the Benicia Old Town Group and Solano Junior College Drama Department. The cast includes Spencer Dawson as the Vagabond, sitting top, and from left to right Christine Wellins as Sally, Dennis Mulligan as Zach and Arnie Hamilton as Willum. The dinner theater is planned Nov. 28-29 and Dec. 5-6 and Dec. 12-13 at the Old Town Theater in Benicia, 140 West J St.—News-Chronicle Photo.

In the Fall of 1969 there was George M. Cohan's "The Tavern", the second production of a Melodrama, well received by the audiences at the Benicia Old Town Theatre. The theatre is Benicia's IDES Hall and its use all these years has been gratefully appreciated by the theatre group.

PAGE 13 — Vallejo Times-Herald, Wed., Dec. 10, 1969

Tavern Production Totally Enjoyable

By FRANCIS FLAHERTY | She portrays a demure woman who repeatedly accuses the Benicia Old Town Group virtually every male in the cast department currently are col- of contributing to her downfall, laboring again, and this time a circumstance that was a fig- their production is "The Tavern" of a hyper-active imagi- Tavern," which shapes up as a satire on melodrama.

Her performance was far and away better than anything she had previously done, and it's totally enjoyable despite the fact the action is at least, had previously done, and it's mildly repetitious. One big Dawson was his usual superb reason the play is being so well received is that few casts. We also were impressed by within memory have given such James Kelleher, who played the an impression of absolutely governor, a man unhappily at- being in love with what they flitted with something like a locomotor, who was seen as the governor's daughter, and by direction was handled ably by Dennis Mulligan and Arnold Hamilton.

It's a big cast — 16 performers in all — and the Solano College's drama department.

He confided that "The Tavern" by the late famed Christine Wellins, the tavern vaudevillian George M. Cohan, maid, screeched nobly, (and "bombed" in New York around here it should be noted fit it, the turn of the century when is relatively easy to become it first was produced.

If it did, and there is no gunfire, distractions which oc- reason to doubt it, the underly cur with great frequency in- ing fact behind the failure prob- "The Tavern".

ably was that Cohan insisted. Piano accompaniment is on his work being taken provided by Onetta FeENEY, seriously.

McDermott and his players before, and the prompter was took a tongue-in-cheek attitude Susan Rae Scott, who also fired in their production, and that the blank pistol as required.

probably accounts for the play. Our T.H. sidekick, Charlotte which laid an egg on Broadway. Pruitt, entertains between acts becoming a hit of some dimen- belting out a medley of Cohan's more famous tunes including sions in Benicia.

Spencer Dawson, identified "Mary," "45 Minutes from only as a vagabond, carriers Broadway," and "Yankee Doo- most of the action in "The die Dandy."

Tavern," which is set. The finale of the play also "somewhere in the early features a Cohan number, "You're A Grand Old Flag."

The plot includes murder and this seems somewhat of robbery, ruination of an incongruity.

Others who contributed nobly every other major crime than the production include Mary facile mind of Cohan could Vickers, Tim Gorelangton, Pat devise and include in his story. Brennan, William Hatfield, and Dawson is ably abetted by J. Eugene Boyle.

any number of people, and this is dinner theatre, and there were several who were the food is catered by Claude particularly impressive. Settle of Vallejo's Redwood Pa- This list is headed by Norma. "The Tavern" will have Sharon, who's been in most of final performances Friday the plays produced by the Old Saturday nights, with a Tavern Group in its brief history 7 and curtain time at

Benicia's Old Town group to present 'The Tavern'

"The Tavern" is a melodrama described as a local version of Tom Jones, written by George M. Cohan and directed by Charles T. McDermott who heads the college drama department, is a swashbuckling tale that takes place in a way station. The production includes a dinner theatre on three consecutive Fridays and Saturdays, is scheduled Nov. 28 and 29, Dec. 5 and 6 and Dec. 12 and 13.

No-host cocktails are planned at 6 p.m., dinner at 7 p.m. and the play will follow at 8:30 p.m. Tax and tip are included in the \$8 admission.

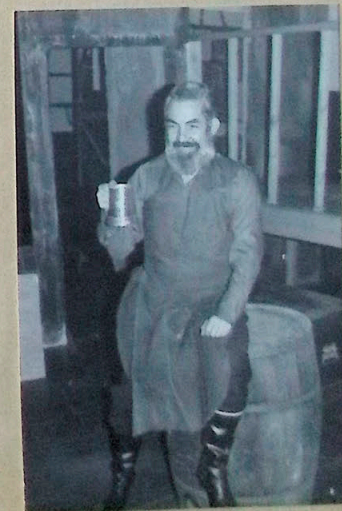
Cohan is reported to have written the leading role of the Vagabond for himself. Spence Dawson, leading man of the recent Mira Theatre hit "Any Wednesday" is cast as the Vagabond.

Other cast members in order of appearance are Dennis Mulligan as Zach, Christine Wellins as Sally, Robert Winters as Freeman, Arnold Hamilton as Willum, Norma Sharon as Violet, James Kelleher as Governor Lamson, Mary Vickers as Mrs. Lamson, Melissa Pritchett as Virginia Lamson, Tim Gorelangton as Tom Allen, Pat Brennan as the Sheriff, William Hatfield as the Sheriff's Man and Les Marti as Attendant Stevens.

Ticket reservations may be obtained at the Muntz Music Co. in Vallejo, 643-5427; Benicia Stationery, 745-2576; the Winters and Winters Law Office in Benicia, 745-0130, or from members of the Benicia Old Town Group.

Gen Coonradt is general chairman and the following are serving as committee chairmen: Mary Ann Wint- tickets and reservations Barbara Pearson, costume Pay Wyatt, programs, L Adams, posters and fly Charlotte and Lisa Pe- publicity, Cathy Chris- hostesses: Ron Adams, bus manager; Phyllis Malicki, and music; Ed Stone, spe- effects and Doug Frey, construction.

Susan Rae Scott is as- sistant director and Jeff Boyle technical director.



Robert Winters—
Tavern Keeper

Sunday Times-Herald

DECEMBER 7, 1969



**'THE TAVERN'
SCORES HIT**

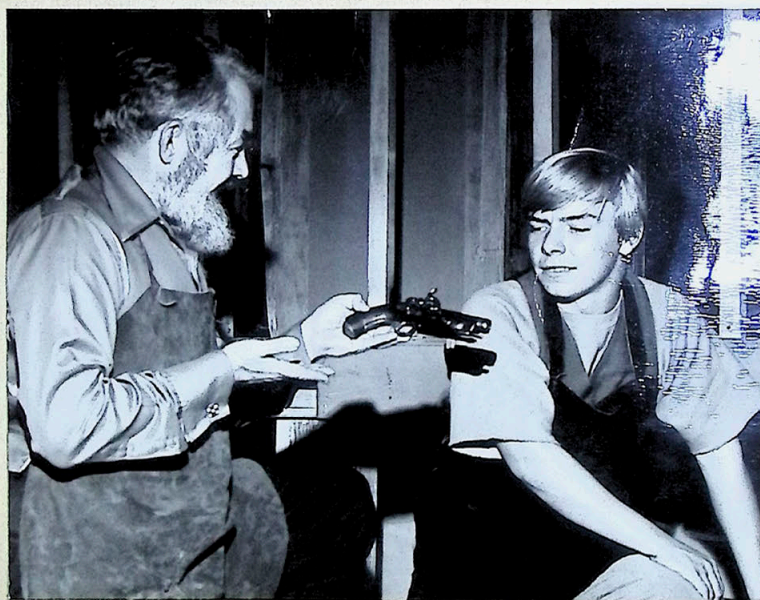
Following two-night presentations for the past two weeks, and high acclaim from its enthusiastic audiences, the dinner-theatre presentation of "The Tavern" will be presented for the third and final week next Friday and Saturday nights, Dec. 12 and 13, in the Benicia Old Town Theater.

Above, Old Town Group member Charlotte Pruitt, center, is featured in the play, leading the audience in a medley of George M. Cohan songs. Admiring her jeweled eating stick are Mr. and Mrs. William Zartman.

Left, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Cox and daughter, Debbie, seated, receive their programs and song sheets from Old Town Group hostesses Phyllis McKeever and Doris Holmes. The production is sponsored jointly by the Solano College Drama Department and the Benicia Old Town Group. Story on page W2, col. 4.—Times-Herald Photos.



Jim Kelleher
as
Gov. Lamson



Robert Winters & Annie Hamilton



Mary Vickers
as
the Governor's
wife



Jim Kelleher
&
Mary Vickers



Christine Wellins
as Sally



Tim Gorlington
as the Fiance
Norma Sharon
as Violet



Robert Winters, Norma
Sharon & Christine Wellins



Christine Wellins
Robert Winters



Melissa Prichett, Tim
Gorlington, Mary Vickers
& (seated) Jim Kelleher

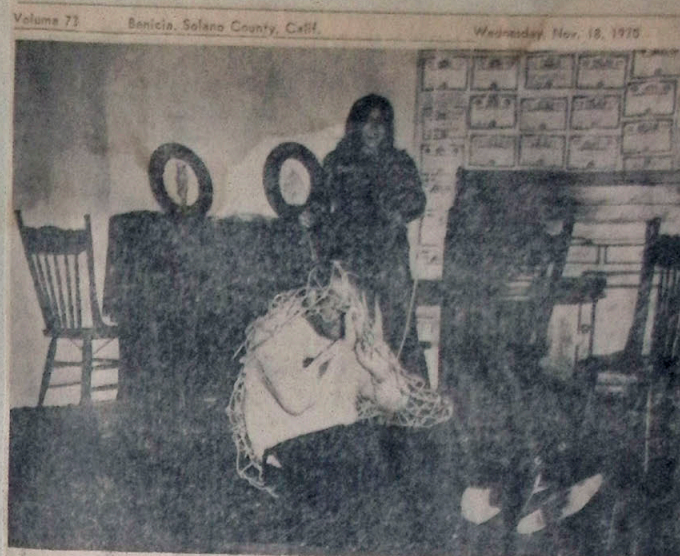
THE GIRLS IN 509
FALL 1970

509



SERVES 'THE GIRLS'

Benicia mailman Gene Wright portrays "Old Jim" the bell-boy in the Benicia Old Town Group's dinner theater production "The Girls in 509" which begins this weekend at the Old Town Theatre (IDES Hall). Wright was associated with WPA theater productions and also worked in radio productions. The rollicking political comedy is being staged under the direction of Karl Barron.



Pictured above are Mary Vickers who plays the role of "Mimsy" and Harry Diavatis as "Professor Pusey" in the Old Town group's dinner theater production of "The Girls in 509," which will have its closing nights November 20 and 21. Tickets for the play are available at the House Village Gifts and Winters and Winters. No reservations are required.

1970 saw "The Girls in 509," a political comedy, directed by Karl Barron, who had earlier brought the Terra Linda Little Theatre to Benicia.

Political comedy got a lot of laughs in 1970 and one of the ~~big~~ biggest laugh-getters was Harry Diavatis, director of tonight's play ... and now it's time for "Luv" ...

AGE 24 — Vallejo Times-Herald, Wed., Nov. 18, 1970



Comedy Lacking In Old Town Play

By FRANCIS FLAHERTY
BENICIA — The Old Town Group, now charting its own course as a theatrical group, almost ran aground with its first independently produced offering, "The Girls in 509."

Not that the comedy wasn't played well, it's just that comedy is an element this show lacks. It also is doubtful whether it was a great deal funnier when it first was produced back in 1958.

Be that as it may, the cast was smooth and well-ordered, a fact that bodes well for the future of the Old Town Group in its offerings.

This play attracted a fine audience Friday night for the Old Towners' famous dinner theatre, which is a catered affair for a nominal price, and Saturday night, the place was all-but-a-sellout. Final performances will be Friday and Saturday nights in the Old Town Theatre.

ONCE BEFORE
We trust the audiences were in an affable mood. We disliked this play so heartily when it was presented in Vallejo about a dozen seasons ago that we immediately cast it out of mind, only to have it pop up again.

Merely too preposterous is the only description that can be assigned the plot. To be sure, it's farce, but not very funny farce. The events and people in them are concerned with politics. Aunt Hetty, (Rhea Leonard), convinced the U.S. is doomed when Hoover is defeated in 1932 betakes herself and her young niece, Mimsy, (Mary Vickers), to Room 509 in a New York Hotel. Like Howard Hughes, they are never known to leave their quarters.

Meanwhile Aunt Hetty's fortunes slide to the point she is reduced to pawning or on the brink of pawning the silver frame that encases William McKinley's photograph.

NEWS PEOPLE
That's about it. The newspaper people are played by Russ Campbell, Spence Dawson, as one dealing with her long-ago Norma Cole and Brian Kelly, romance with Langley Collier, which must stir up memories among the over-50 set. Collier and his brother died wealthy in an unbelievably filthy New York brownstone house about a quarter-century ago, and made a splash in the hinterlands for all of one day.

Now, a pseudo-reporter, (Harry Diavatis), learns of the remarkable lives being led by the two women, and inveigles the hotel bellboy, Old Jim, (Gene Wright), to get him inside the apartment.

This is done, and Mimsy is smitten.

Hard on the heels of this development, politics returns to 509. The hotel is sold to the Democratic National Committee for its headquarters, and the girls are about to be dispossessed. The Republicans, first, and then the Democrats, save them temporarily at least.

TWIN ROLES
Author Howard Teichman, apparently in an attempt to depict humorously the view that political bosses are at least equivalent, assigns the roles of chairmen of both major parties to a single actor (Robert Savage).

And to demonstrate that lawyers are venal, to say the least, he creates an attorney for Aunt Hetty, who gives a glib explanation of how her \$10 million fortune somehow found its way into the hands of his family's firm. (The lawyer, (Richard Morris), somehow is fairly plausible.)

As a matter of fact, there isn't a bad job of acting in the lot, although perhaps Diavatis could have been a mile more restrained.

He is the one who, although a town lawyer, turns up the sheets of GM stock that restores Aunt Hetty's fortune, and in the doing gets her and Mimsy out of the hotel.

With Campbell having the biggest role.

The cast was directed by Karl Barron, Marin County stage professional.

Benicia Old Town Theatre
140 West "J" Street, Benicia

No 183

Saturday, November the 14th

DINNER THEATRE

"THE GIRLS IN 509"

Written by Howard Teichmann
Directed by Karl Barron
Presented by Benicia Old Town Group

COCKTAILS	6:00 P.M.	\$6.00 includes Tax AND TIP
DINNER	7:00 P.M.	
CURTAIN	8:30 P.M.	

Benicia mailman Gene Wright features as "Old Jim" the bell-boy who serves the "Girls in 509," current production of the Benicia Old Town Group. The dinner theatre has two more runs on Friday and Saturday, Nov. 20 and 21, at the Old Town Theatre in Benicia, 140 West J St. The political comedy is directed by Karl Barron and produced by Spence Dawson who are well known to area theater goers. Tickets are available at Munter Made in Vallejo and the Washington House, Village Gifts and Winters and Winters in Benicia.

Theatre group final w

"The Girls in 509" Old Town group's dinner theatre production, its closing nights Nov. 20 and 21. Mary Barron, out of town poster and the political comedy is preceded by the cocktail hour.

Mary Vickers, who plays the role of Mimsy and Harry Diavatis as Professor Pusey.

Mary Vickers is an Allied Products in Benicia, and two children previously seen on stage as the governor "The Teenage."

Diavatis is a student of California Maritime. He is resident in Benicia with his wife, Sally, and a Michael. He is now a senior stage but has a lot of theatrical work. He directed a Theatre production "Man" and has performed Salt Lake City theatre "Old Couple," "Phil Here I Come," "The G and many others.

Tickets for the Benicia Theatre are \$6.00 for the dinner and play. Tickets are available at the Village Gifts and Winters. Reservations are required for the final performances.

IT'S RIC

Today's Chus

Nothing can cause mixed emotions than getting to the dentist only to find he's been away.

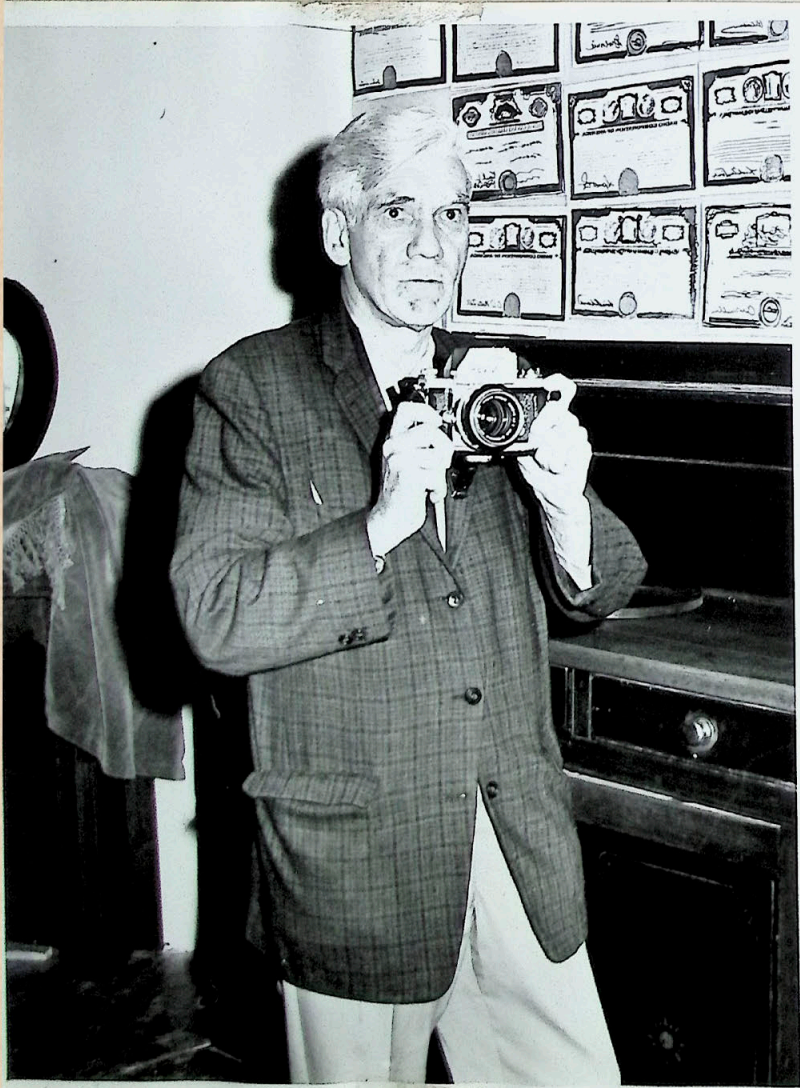
BENICIA PLAY — A long political comedy, "The Girls in 509," will be presented as dinner theatre on the weekends in November. Benicia Old Town Group.

The production, plans 6 and 7, 13 and 14 and 20 will be held in the Benicia Theatre, 140 West J St. (IDES Hall).

FINE CAST — The cast by Rhea Leonard as Aunt Hetty, a long-time favorite theatergoer. The play spotlights Mary Vickers, who has been seen as the daughter in "The Teenage" by Spence Dawson, Norma and Harry Diavatis.

Benicia High School. Derek Holmes is seen as "Fred" and Benicia's Gene Wright appears as "Jim" the hotel bellboy.

FULL EVENING — A social hour starts the night off at 6 p.m. dinner follows and curtain time is 8:30 p.m. Vallejoans may pick up tickets at Munter Made, Georgia St. Tickets are available at various spots in the including Village Gifts, First St., 140 West J St. and Winters and Winters. 177 East M St. Tickets are not available.



FUN, FROLIC AT BENICIA FIREMEN'S MUSTER



You can roll up the hose girls, the fire's out as the old saying goes. If this is the varsity maybe we should wait until the Jayvees come marching along. Instead of pulling a hose cart, they should be pushing a shopping cart.

Old-Time Equipment Gives Annual Exhibitions



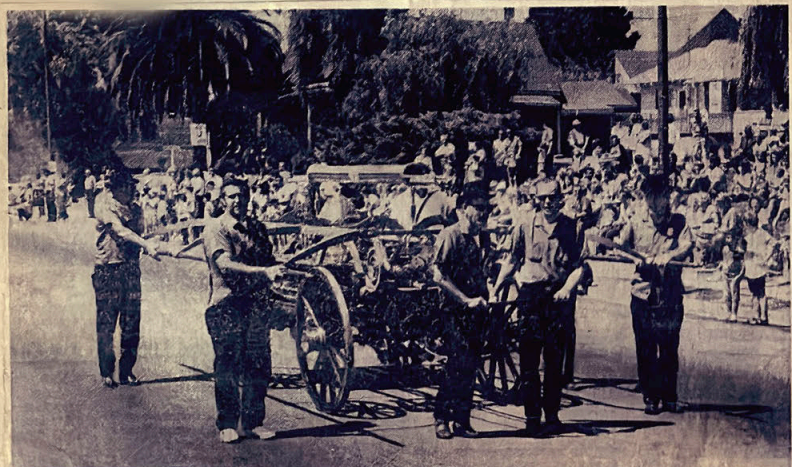
Benicia Post 2938, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and its Auxiliary was very much in the forefront of Sunday's Firemen's Muster parade in Benicia. In the background is a cross section of the huge crowd which watched the line of march from the city park vantage point.



Members of the Benicia Old Town Women's Team proudly display their participation trophies awarded in the First Annual Firemen's Muster. The girls, left to right, Kathy Christo, Pat Wyatt, Phyllis Malicki and Carol Rich, ran a mad pace of 46 seconds placing last in the hose cart races on Sunday afternoon but placing first among enthusiastic supporters of the delightful exhibition. They probably are the only women to compete in the history of hose cart races.



Pioneer Unit No. 1 from Napa headed by foreman Bob Foley takes an awful lot of back bending plus huffing and puffing to produce a strong stream of water. was a gasser. The hand-operated pump is a Jeffers and it



Here is Blue Boy, a reconstructed Cowing & Co. pumper, which is the pride of the San Andreas volunteer fire department. The foreman in charge of the crew is James Hamblin. This team always is a serious contender in Muster parades.




It could only happen in Benicia where this Veterans of Foreign Wars funny car and its three occupants traveled the entire route of the parade backwards — so their friends would think the led the affair. Some people will do anything for a laugh.

Benicia Old Town Group Participating in the Fireman's Muster



Old Town Proves 'Luv' Is Greatest

 Benicia Old Town Theatre Group



Judy Towey sweeps while her husband, Pat, holds the dustpan and daughter, Elyse, watches during a cleanup on the set of "Luv" now in rehearsal in Denicia. Robert K. Winters takes a coffee break from his stage construction chores to check the clean sweep.

BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE
LUV
FRIDAYS ♥ SATURDAYS
MAY 7-8 ♥ 14-15 ♥ 21-22
745-0130
CURTAIN 830 pm



You can "e" it's Jean Brownlee putting the finishing touches on the huge outdoor sign announcing the forthcoming production of "Lov" by the Bendin Old Town Theater group. The sign will be placed in front of the theater at 1631

West J. St. Jean's sign painting helpers are Phyllis Mallick, second from right, and Sharon Patch, right.—Wednesday News-Chronicle Photos.



Master carpenter Doug Frey works on the cables holding the "raked" stage while Gen Conradt, general chairman for the theater group, steadies the ladder.



Wanda Flowers Edith Lewis Lou Sanders



Wanda Flowers Steve Andresen



Mary Gonsalves Mary Townsend Andy Tozier



Lou Sanders Sheldon Hankin Edith Lewis

'Tartuffe' By Old Town Group Called 'Splendid, Entertaining'

By JIMMIE JONES
Benicia's Old Town Players previewed their Fall production, the Moliere comedy "Tartuffe," Saturday night and a most splendid and entertaining production it is.

A social satire dating back to the middle 1600s, "Tartuffe" is a critical study of France, under the reign of Louis XIV, and its failure to conform to the ideals of urbanity, pragmatism and worldly common sense so cherished as virtues of the period.

Moliere points out the failings of his central characters, representing two levels of society, to meet these criteria. Tartuffe is a rogue and scoundrel, an odious hypocrite whose apparent religiosity and asceticism are eventually unmasked. The rich merchant, Orgon, who befriends Tartuffe, is a dupe in whom Moliere satirizes the solid, middle class citizen.

Orgon's false sense of values impels him to give his daughter a "good" marriage against her wishes, disfigure his son, sign over his

property to Tartuffe and himself be tricked by a fashionable rascal who uses pretended piety as an excuse for financial gain and amatory conquests.

Moliere's audience got the message. The play underwent three revisions before the king could allow it to be produced without extreme pressure from the church fathers. But Moliere's petitions finally were allowed and Tartuffe, the imposter, has been a favorite of audiences for over three centuries.

The show is directed by Georgia Taylor Benedict, and is the young Benicia's first attempt of a full-scale production, according to the program. She has done a tremendous job. Her characters come and go with purpose, the blocking is smooth and the pace could scarcely be faulted. She would seem to have done her homework on the staging of neoclassic comedy, and the show signals an auspicious start to a directorial career.

Her work was certainly aided by a talented cast. The masks and wigs are finely

etched and sensitively portrayed by Jim Harper as the duped Orgon, Spencer Dawson as the scoundrel Tartuffe, Terry Stephens as the flirtatious second wife Elmire and Karen Lamoree as the bosomy maid with the big mouth.

Strong in supporting roles were Danny Clark as Elmire's brother, Cleante, the representation of the author's point of view, Mark Johnson as the impetuous son Damis, Mary Raahauge as the daughter Mariane and Maria Rodriguez as Orgon's equally duped mother.

There simply isn't room to list all of the things I liked about the play but to offer a few well-deserved compliments will stand for all. Jim Harper and Spencer Dawson played their scenes excellently, understating their characters effectively. Miss Stephens looked and acted every bit the pampered, sought-after wife of a wealthy Parisian, and handled the famous table scene with aplomb. And Mrs. Lamoree, as the vocal demure, mugged delightfully and tossed her

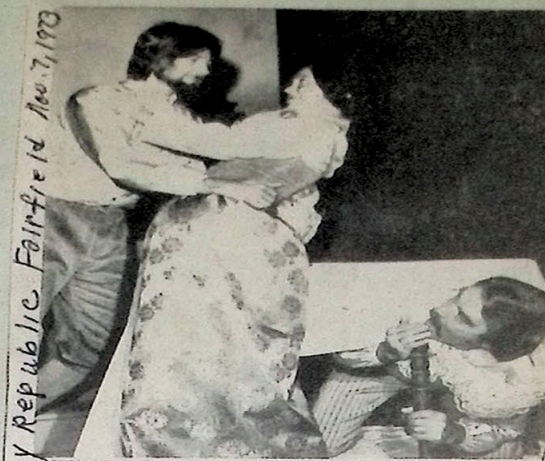
asides to the audience with a flair.

The costuming is excellent, particularly Miss Stephens' elegant gown. The styling is correct and richly tailored for an amateur group with a tight budget.

The set was visually interesting and I liked the technique of having the acting troupe dress it during the prologue. Compliments should also go to the hair stylist for some intricate and ornate hairdos on both the women and the men. The wigs go well with the characters. (I assume most of the men wear wigs although in this day and time one can't be certain.)

Also deserving of mention is the attractive hall decorations of flags and pennants plus renderings of Moliere and Louis XIV captioned with appropriate quotations.

The comedy is light and frothy, with little slapstick and farce. It draws chuckles, not bellylaughs, but the lines are witty and the situations humorous. And as befitting satire, perhaps you'll see parts of yourself portrayed.



HIDING under the table, Orgon (Jim Harper) learns for himself that his wife (Terry Stephens) is coveted by his hypocritical houseguest, Tartuffe (Spencer Dawson). Benicia Old Town Theater Group will conclude its fall production of Moliere's comedy, "Tartuffe," this weekend at IDES Hall in Benicia. — BOTG Photo

Old Town Theater Group Excels With 'Tartuffe'

By JUDY RICHTER
DR Reporter

BENICIA—Benicia Old Town Theater Group's fall production of Moliere's comedy, "Tartuffe," closes this Friday and Saturday at IDES Hall, 140 W. J St., Benicia.

With this closing, the group can chalk up another success. It may be an amateur company with limited facilities, but the Benicia group delivers a solid, entertaining performance.

Though Moliere wrote the play in 17th century France during the reign of Louis XIV, its message makes sense today as it satirizes excesses of religious and moral hypocrisy.

Title Character

Spencer Dawson is outstanding as the title character. Tartuffe's cunning domination of the host Orgon family and his self-serving righteousness are conveyed subtly with the slightest arch of an eyebrow or flick of a lace handkerchief.

The flippant maid, Filote, is energetic, outspoken and nosy. Pacia Clark's portrayal enhances the play's comic pace.

Other noteworthy performances come from Jim Harper as the hoodwinked Orgon, Terry Stephens as his wife and Mary Julia Raahauge as his daughter.

Beautiful Costumes

Costumes designed by Cynthia Morris are beautiful



Karen Lamoree, as the bright, quick-tongued maid, chastises Orgon (Jim Harper) for his blind acceptance of Tartuffe. Marianne (Mary Raahauge) looks on, aghast. The Benicia Theatre's production has two more weekends to run and tickets are still available. One may call Munter Music (643-5427) or Winters and Winters (745-6130) for information for dinner-play and non-dinner performances.

The Word Is Relevant

"A play written 300 years ago cannot be treated as a museum piece if it is to have relevance to today," director Georgia Taylor Benedict believes.

Relevant is the word for Moliere's satire, Tartuffe (the hypocrite). A middle-class citizen's weaknesses are cleverly illustrated in the Benicia Theatre Group's production of the French Comedy.

The talented young director, Mrs. Benedict, and her assistant-director, Bob Harper, have successfully guided a fine cast and stage crew to present an entertaining and thought-provoking play that has been enthusiastically receptive

and critics have been more than generous in their praise of the new production.

Tickets for most dinner performances are still available. For information regarding the play, several outlets may be called . . . in Vallejo Munter Music (643-5427), in Benicia Winters and Winters (745-6130) or Wolff's City Drug (745-4366), and in Lafayette, Campana's Music Store (284-6634). Tickets for the dinner-play are \$7 and are available for this Friday and Saturday and Nov. 9-10. There is a no-dinner performance this Sunday, and tickets are \$2.50 for adults and \$1.50 for students.

Old Town Plans Event

BENICIA — Variety has been the keynote of the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group since its beginning in 1964 with "Anniversary Waltz." Since that time comedy, melodrama, off-beat (Dinny and the Witches), love-triangles and classics (Our Town, Time of Your Life) have been produced.

Along with the play the Benicia Group has combined dinner, sometimes cabaret atmosphere and even a Friday Night Ice Cream Parlor theater night was done with Our Town and Time of Your Life.

This fall the enthusiastic group is presenting dinner with their 17th century satire, Tartuffe. Tartuffe is a demanding play in that the players must present themselves in the daily habit of 300 years ago . . . a time of fans and kerchiefs. Costumes are elaborate and wigs are imperative.

Tickets for this new endeavor are available through Munter Music (643-5427), Wolff's City Drug (745-4366) and Winters and Winters in Benicia (745-6130). Opening night is October 26, continuing October 27, November 2, 3, 8 and 10. Cocktails are served from 6:30, dinner at 7:15 and curtain time is 8:30. A special Sunday, non-dinner performance will be held November 4 at 7:30 p.m.



Barbara Allen, played by Nancy Gonsalves, has died...Join the witch-boy, Steve Andresen is being enticed away by Dark witch, Susie Harper and Fair witch, Nancy Harper...in "Dark of the Moon".



Steve Andresen, Join the witch-boy is being warned about being a human by Dark witch, Susie Harper and Fair witch, Nancy Harper... plus advice from Conjure woman, Mari Heinmiller and Conjure man Jim Harper. In "Dark of the Moon".....



Mari Heinmiller Jim Harper



Lith Lewis - Nancy Gonsalves - Marilyn Jackson - Mary Miles

Lure Of 'Harvey' Still Powerful

By JIMMIE JONES
Times-Herald Entertainment Editor

Mary Chase's classic "Harvey" is as durable as any comedy ever to play the Great White Way and it maintains that durability as presented by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group last night.

A lot of audiences have roared at the play's comic lines since the late Antoinette Perry first directed it on Broadway in 1944. This amount of overexposure perhaps is the biggest obstacle facing amateur groups attempting to produce it today. Some mighty big names have played the central characters both on the stage and on television and it's difficult not to hold the amateur up to comparison with, say, a Helen Hayes or Jimmy Stewart.

The opening night crowd, attending a benefit for the Solano College Choir, welcomed the performance like it was the Broadway debut, however, proving that the magic of the invisible white rabbit is as powerful as ever.

There are some excellent performances by the cast. Edith Lewis sparkles as Vera Louise Simmons and her entrance in the second act after she has been mistakenly tossed into a sanitarium, stripped of her clothes by a male attendant and nearly drowned in a hydrotherapy bath, is the best scene of the play.

EFFECTIVE AIR
Andy Tozier, a newcomer to the local stage, plays the eccentric Elwood P. Dowd with an absent-minded air that is quite effective but he overworks the dramatic pause a bit and needs to

jump on his cues faster. He maintains a preoccupied, unaffected manner that does justice to the part but his movements with the invisible pooka are not smooth, partially destroying the illusion of the omnipresent rabbit.

Director Bill Granger has chosen to play the comedy quite broadly but I have to quarrel with some characterizations. He seems to desire that everyone project vast amounts of kookiness, ruining the residual charm and inherent sympathy of more subdued versions.

Wanda Flowers, normally a competent actress, should be spanked for overplaying the role of Myrtle Mae so strongly. She mugs and burlesques the character too broadly, even within the scope of the overall interpretation.

Robert Winters plays Dr. Chumley with a flair but while the script pegs him as a quiet, competent, scholarly psychiatrist (if there be such an animal, he winds up acting as dinky as the inmates of his sanitarium).

Also overplaying her role to a lesser degree is Marilyn Jackson as Nurse Kelly, though again it's a question of the director's desire for an overall effect. Danny Clark, planning her love interest, Dr. Sanderson, understates his role more effectively.

GOOD JOB
Obviously miscast is Steve Andresen, who did a commendable job as the Witch Boy in the group's Fall Show, but is too young to play the sanitarium attendant Wilson. His makeup is terrible and he needs to work on bringing his voice down an octave or so.

The small parts are excellently handled by Lou Sanders as the pompous Judge Gaffney, Rhea Leonard as Mrs. Chumley, Sheldon Hankin as the cab driver, Mary Townsend as Mrs. Chauvenet and Mary Gonzales as the maid.

The show requires two sets and the technical crew has done a good job on the Dowd parlor, though the sanitarium looks to be hastily assembled. Lighting is adequate but flickered and of distraction.

The costumes are right for the period and add to the laughs in the case of Judge Gaffney's knickers and Myrtle Mae's schlocky wardrobe.

If the production has one overriding fault, it's the first act—which drags on interminably. The pace quickens in the second act, however, and it's generally smooth sailing from then on.

All in all, it's a good show, full of funny—if familiar—lines and certain to please theatre fans.

That Rabbit Is In Benicia

Patrons of Benicia Old Town Theatre's current play, "Harvey," will be interested in the humorous ten-foot rabbit sketches which adorn the walls of the theater. Remaining performances of this dinner theatre production are Apr. 6, 7, 8 and 14 in Benicia's I.D.E.S. hall. There is one no-dinner showing April 9 at 7:30.

Trina Tucker, Old Town member who drew the sketches, is a long time friend of "Harvey" author Mary Chase, and grew up with the Chase children in Colorado. She remembers Mrs. Chase as a fascinating storyteller.

Trina also executed the portraits used on stage in "Harvey" and was assisted in these by Cynthia Morris. Tom Ryan and Crawford Tucker are responsible for the mounting.

The Daily Republic, Fairfield, Calif., Wed., March 22, 1973—Page 23

'Harvey' Treat Set At Benicia

By JUDY RICHTER
DR Reporter

BENICIA—The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group is treating audiences to another enjoyable production, Mary Chase's "Harvey."

The play premiered Friday in a benefit for the Solano Community College choir's spring trip to Switzerland.

First a Broadway hit, then a successful movie, "Harvey" is the story of a middle-aged bachelor, Elwood P. Dowd, who has an imaginary friend, Harvey, a six-foot-tall white rabbit.

Totter As Dowd
The Benicia production features Andy Tozier as Dowd. His characterization includes the right gestures, facial expressions and walk indicative of the mild-mannered, slightly crazy Dowd. However, one wishes he would use conversational constructions rather than "I am happy to meet you" or "Here is my card." His stilted delivery sounds more like reading than talking.

Edith Lewis is outstanding as Dowd's harried sister, Vita Louise Simmons. She more than anyone else adds the fine details needed for first-rate comedy.

The play has good casting and setting in other major roles filled by Wanda Flowers as Myrtle Mae Simmons, Marilyn Jackson as Nurse Kelly, Danny Clark as Dr. Sanderson, Bob Winters as Dr. Chumley and Louis Sanders as Judge Gaffney.

Lesser Roles

Other cast members with lesser roles never the less turn in noteworthy performances: Mary Townsend as Mrs. Chauvenet, Rhea Leonard as

Mrs. Chauvenet and Sheldon Hankin as the cabdriver.

Willard Granger deserves applause for careful direction, especially obvious in upbeat timing and staging.

Seven clever rabbit drawings—all about six feet tall—by Trina Tucker adorn the walls.

Note to be overlooked is that this is dinner-theater with a generous, tasty, meal catered by a Vallejo restaurant.

Other performances are set for Friday and Saturday, April 6 and 7, and April 13 and 14.

5—BENICIA HERALD, Thursday, March 29,



A ROMANTIC EXCHANGE between Dr. Sanderson on the left, played by Danny Clark and Nurse Kelly, played by Marilyn Jackson, is part of the amusement in the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of "Harvey" appearing on weekends here through April 14.

Run continues on weekend

Harvey production rated a 'chuckler'

By BOB SILVA

I was asked to review the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's newest production, "Harvey," in these pages this week. I have had some experience in covering sports events, and even developed systems for retaining information for later use in my stories; but I didn't keep a running score on "Harvey," because I didn't know how to go about it.

If I were to guess at the final tally, though, I'd say it was a tie of some kind. The cast seemed to enjoy most of its work, and the audience, likewise enjoyed most of the product.

I'd like to say that "Harvey," an old chestnut by Mary Chase which has been around since the '40s, was a howling winner here last weekend; but it was more of a chuckler than a winner. There were a few moments of fun in the popular classic, about the man who befriended an imaginary rabbit, but there were restless periods of long dialogue that prevented it from running away to victory.

Andy Tozier plays the role of Elwood P. Dowd, the kook with his friendly "Pooka," Harvey. He's believable as a screwball, but also tiresome. He played the kind of boring nut one prefers to avoid than to laugh at.

Edith Lewis turns in a fine performance as Elwood's sister, Vita Louise Simmons, and sparkles in the play's best scene in the second act when she returns from a sanitarium, where she was mistakenly committed, instead of her brother. At the sanitarium, she had been stripped of her clothing and tossed into a hydrotherapy bath. But even this scene falls short of expectation. Her appearance upon returning home, though ruffled, was not consistent with what had apparently taken place at the sanitarium. Her clothing was not torn, and her hair, after being thrown in a bath, was not as bedraggled as one might ex-

pect after such an ordeal. Bob Winters plays his role as Doctor Chumley with finesse, and had an over-all good night on the stage. Danny Clark, as Chumley's assistant, also was in good form, but some of his lines were much too lengthy.

Mary Townsend, playing Mrs. Ethel Chauvenet, had a small part which lived the first act, but she was not seen thereafter, to this "critic's" distress.

Other major characters in the play seemed to be victims of either poor direction or poor eyesight. They seemed to be too much of a physis placed on express in the eyes of Ruth Kelly, nurse, played by Marilyn Jackson; Duane Wilson, attendant at the sanitarium, played by Steve Andresen; and Myrtle Mae Simmons, played by Wanda Flowers. These three spent most of their time on the stage looking at each other, to varying degrees of amazement, shock, fright and anger; all of it seemed overdone.

The lesser roles, handled by Louis Sanders as Judge Omar Gaffney, Rhea Leonard, Sheldon Hankin and Mary Gonzales.

The sets were very pleasing. The Simmons' bary was cleverly arranged and acceptable, but the reception room of Chumley Rest, the sanitarium, seemed to be assembled, painted and decorated the patients, possibly therapeutic purposes.

Overall, "Harvey" directed by Willard Granger, amusing, if a mite slow.

The play has three more weekends to run on March 30, 31, April 6, 7 and April 13, 14. It is presented as a dinner-theatre featuring no-alcohol cocktails at 6:15, dinner at 7:15 and 8:30 curtain at night.

On Sunday, April 19, performance without the dinner scheduled.

Tickets for all performances are available at Wolf's Drugs and Winters in Benicia, at Minter's Music, Vallejo. The theatre is located at West J Street.



Chumley listens enviously to Tozier's account of Harvey's theatre production of Mary Chase's



SPIC AND SPAN is the appearance of the old depot building where the first annual Depot Arts and Crafts Show will be on display over the weekend. A member of

the Benicia Old Town Group is busily shining a window on the building where over 40 artists and craftsmen will have exhibits. — Benicia Herald Photo.

Local artists display creations

Depot art, craft show to unveil over weekend

The first of what hopefully will become an annual event — the Depot Arts and Crafts Show — will be on display this weekend in the old depot building at the end of First Street. The affair will be conducted for two days, on Saturday and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., and prospects of large throngs are good.

A unique undertaking, sponsored by the Benicia Old Town Group, the show will be composed almost entirely of exhibits fashioned by local artists and craftsmen. Benicia has a large

population of artists and craftsmen, many of whom enjoy national and international reputations. Many have had extensive training here and abroad. Others are self-taught.

The depot building — considered in some plans as a future museum building — will be filled with 43 entries, and all but three of them will have been filled by Benicians.

The exhibits cover a wide variety of arts and skills including silk screen, ceramics, oils, watercolor, acrylic painting, candles, macrame

and leather, rugs, sculpture, stained and blown glass, liquid embroidery, jewelry, pen and ink drawings, wood carving, batik, metal sculpture and photography.

Admission to the show will be \$1.00 and advance ticket sales are now in progress at Village Gifts, Sproule-Reitz and Winters & Winters.

In addition to the wide variety of exhibits, there will be 23 demonstrations each day showing various art techniques and other skills.

Included with the admission will be a handsome printed program outlining

the background of each exhibitor, and wine punch will be served in the afternoon by the Benicia Old Town Group.

Also on the program will be musical entertainment throughout each day.

Other special features include a remarkable replica of an old steam engine, built by Ralph Simmons of Vallejo. Ten years in the making, the engine is in complete operable condition. It weighs 350 pounds.

The famous antique Benicia Fire Engine will be on display, and the Diablo A's

from Contra Costa County will be in Benicia in force in their antique automobiles on Sunday for a tour of the city.

Neel Rich, president of the Benicia Old Town Group is chairman of the event, and is being assisted by the entire BOTG membership.

Funds derived from the weekend show will be used to support several projects on the planning boards of the BOTG including development of a mini-park in West Benicia which has been approved by the Benicia Planning Commission.

Benicia
Where California's First State Capitol Still Stands.



Home Of California's Largest Port-Oriented Industrial Park
Herald

Volume 74 Benicia, Solano County, Calif.

May 17, 1972

Number 47

Art & Craft Show - Sponsored by Benicia Old Town Group
May 17, 1972

Vallejo Times-Herald
SOLANO AND NAPA COUNTY'S MORNING NEWSPAPER
THIRD SECTION VALLEJO, CALIF., SAT., MAY 20, 1972 PAGE 17

Arts And Crafts Show In Benicia

BENICIA — The Benicia Old Town Group will present its first annual Depot Arts and Crafts Show today and Sunday in the old Southern Pacific Depot at the foot of First St. Hours both days are 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

There are more than 40 separate entries in the show, which will include continuous demonstrations of various art and craft skills throughout both days.

The old railway station waiting room has been set aside and 20 demonstrations have been scheduled for each day of the show. Among the skills to be demonstrated are silkscreen techniques, metal sculpture, ceramic sculpture, pot throwing, liquid embroidery, jewelry, printmaking, pen and ink drawing, batik, yuku, candle making and leather and macrame techniques.

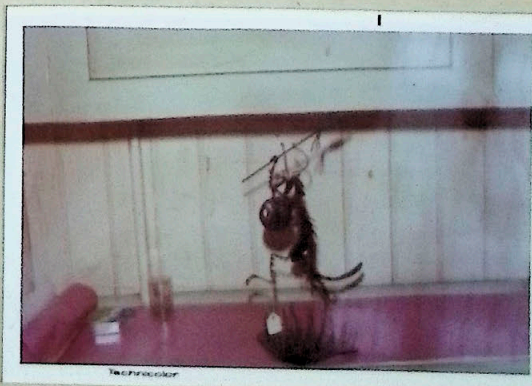
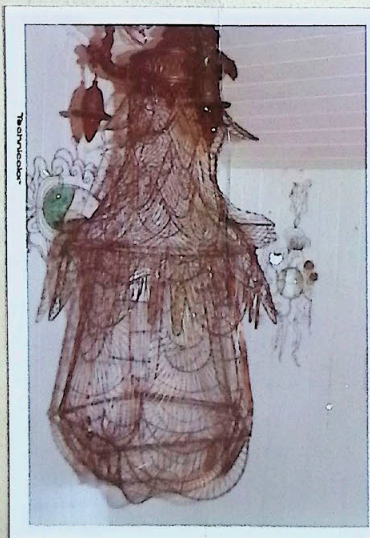
In addition to the art and craft works that will be on display and available for purchase, a featured exhibit will be a fully operational, scale model steam locomotive more than six feet in length.

Constructed by Ralph Simmons of Vallejo, the locomotive was built over a period of ten years and is complete in every detail — even to the water sight glasses for the coal-fired boiler.

The locomotive weighs more than 250 pounds and required special rigging when it was set up for display.

Towne Group for further depot restoration and development of a public waterfront park at West Fourteenth St.

A printed program briefly summarizing the depot's history and describing each of the artists whose works are entered in the show will be distributed. In addition, liquid refreshments will be provided by the Benicia Old Town Group and live classical music will be offered by Nancy Dols each afternoon.





JOHN the witch-boy (Steve Andersen) assures his wife Barbara Allen (Nancy Gonsalves) that he's human.

Adaptability Lends Itself To Success

By JUDY RICHTER
DR Staff Writer

BENICIA—Attention to detail marks the difference between bad and good, mediocre and excellent in almost anything, including the theater.

On that point alone, Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of "Dark of the Moon" by Howard Richardson rates near the top, especially since the company is not professional.

Ability to adapt to less than ideal facilities without compromising quality is another area where the performance excels.

Director Deserves Credit
Director Karl Barron no doubt deserves the greatest amount of credit for these accomplishments, but he has help from able actors and crew members.

Attention to detail is apparent throughout the performance. It shows in set design, lighting, staging, and the way cast members stay in character.

Steve Andersen plays John the witch-boy. Andersen effectively makes the transition from witch to human through subtle changes in voice, gestures and general manner. As a witch he seems properly evil yet envious of humans.

Hero Seems Confident

As a human he seems confident, even cocky as he woos and marries Barbara Allen, the girl he fell in love with during his witch days. His presence is commanding, even when he's in the background.

Nancy Gonsalves turns in an adequate performance as Barbara Allen, the flirtatious young woman who succumbs to John's mystery and flair. She's at her best in the climactic

revival scene.

The village folk at this old-fashioned, hand-clapping, foot-stomping revival turn their exhortations on Barbara. They beg her to repent her mistake of falling under John's spell, marrying him and giving birth to a witch baby; which was stillborn, then burned.

Girl Changes Mind

When her parents dragged her to the revival, Barbara was unrepentant and rebellious. During the singing and preaching she says nothing, but her face reflects her distaste for the scene. Gradually, however, she shows traces of doubt until she finally repents and asks for salvation.

Her salvation, delivered by ex-beau Marvin Hudgens (stiffly played by Danny Clark), indirectly brings about her death and the end of John's career as a human.

Don Miles and Edith Lewis as Barbara's parents record convincing performances. They typify the people of the Smokey Mountain village: They're religious, superstitious, loving, conforming and receptive to life's little pleasures—music and mountain dew.

Preacher Leads

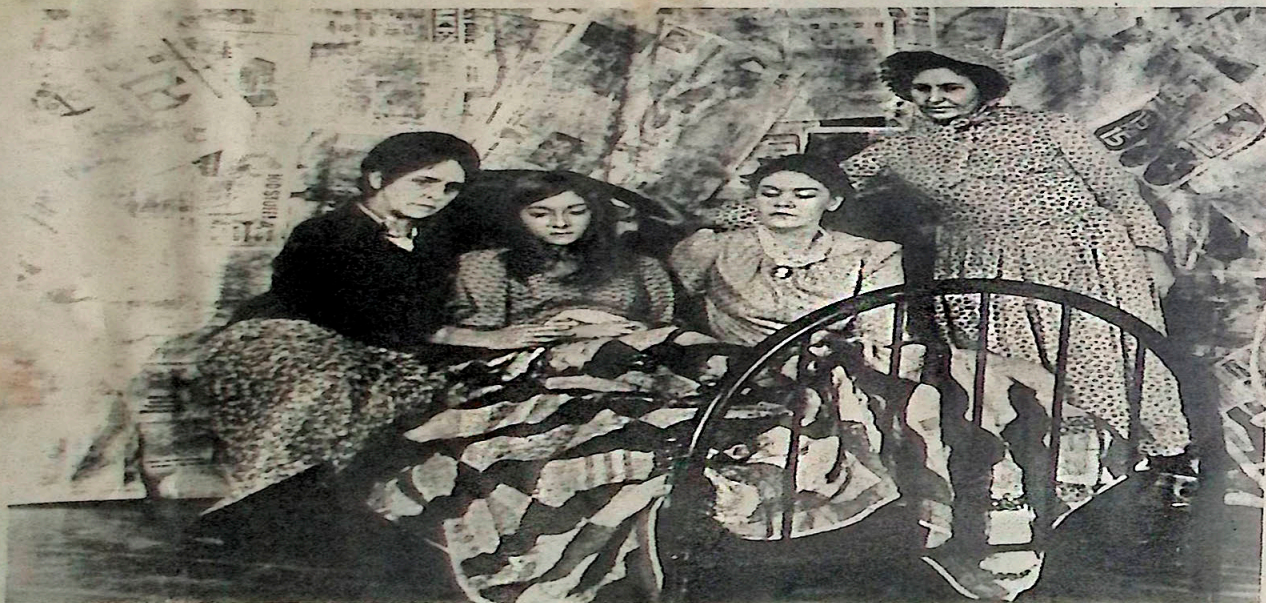
Preacher Haggler, ably played by Louis Sanders, is the spiritual leader of the mountain flock. He delivers the community's moral judgments and preaches fire-and-brimstone oratory. He also can interpret the Scriptures to justify an occasional swig of corn whiskey and a friendly wager.

Other notable supporting performances come from Norma Sharon as Miss Metcalf, the town flirt; Marilyn Jackson as Mrs. Summey, the midwife; Susie Harper and Nancy Harper as the witches; Jim Harper and Mari Heinmiller as the Conjureman and Conjurewoman.

The play abounds in well timed delivery for maximum humor. Singing of old folk songs is so spontaneous that people in the audience seem inclined to clap their hands and chime in on the familiar choruses.

Troup Adapts

Cast and crew carry out adaptation to facilities so well that once the play begins, the audience is hardly aware of the smallish stage and barn 22nd hall. Staging provides for various levels and depths. Choreography by Nancy Harper is well contained without seeming cramped.



AFTER burning the stillborn witch baby, Mrs. Allen (Edith Lewis) comforts Barbara (Nancy Gonsalves), joined by

midwife Mrs. Summey (Marilynn Jackson) and chief scrub nurse Mrs. Bergen (Mary Miles).



Harper, John the witch-boy (Jim Harper) bargains for

Vallejo Times Herald Oct. 29, 1972



SPECIAL PLAY PERFORMANCE SET TONIGHT

Preacher Haggler, Lou Sanders, prepares to save the souls of some "sinners." Mark Johnson, Nancy Gonsalves, Edith Lewis and Phil Smith, in this scene from the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group production of "Dark of the Moon." Church musicians are Bill Needham and

Mike Gillen. A play-only performance will be offered at 7:30 p.m. tonight at HDS Hall with tickets on sale at the door. Final dinner theater performances will be given next Friday and Saturday night and reservations may be made by phoning 745-8128.



Jen Coonradt, costume committee chairman, does emergency repair work on Kent Benedict's shoes. Benedict plays France's Prince Philip in "The Lion in Winter,"

production of the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group which opens April 15 for three weekends.



Costuming is a major chore in a period play such as "The Lion in Winter." Seamstress Betty McFadden checks the hem on Bob Bender's garb. Bender plays Prince John in the play, to be presented April 15, 21-22, 28-29 by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group.



Kathy Hurt, King Henry's mistress Alais in "The Lion in Winter," is fitted with a cloak by Carol Hanson, wardrobe attendant for the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group.

The play will be presented three weekends beginning April 15 as a dinner-theatre production. Ticket information may be obtained by calling 745-0130 in Benicia.



Stage technicians for the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group are shown above. From left are Robert Winters, lighting; Tim Hurt, sound; Richard Morris, stage manager, and

Mary Ann Winters, producer. The play, "The Lion in Winter" is the group's most ambitious production to date.—Nur-Jaleen Egelston



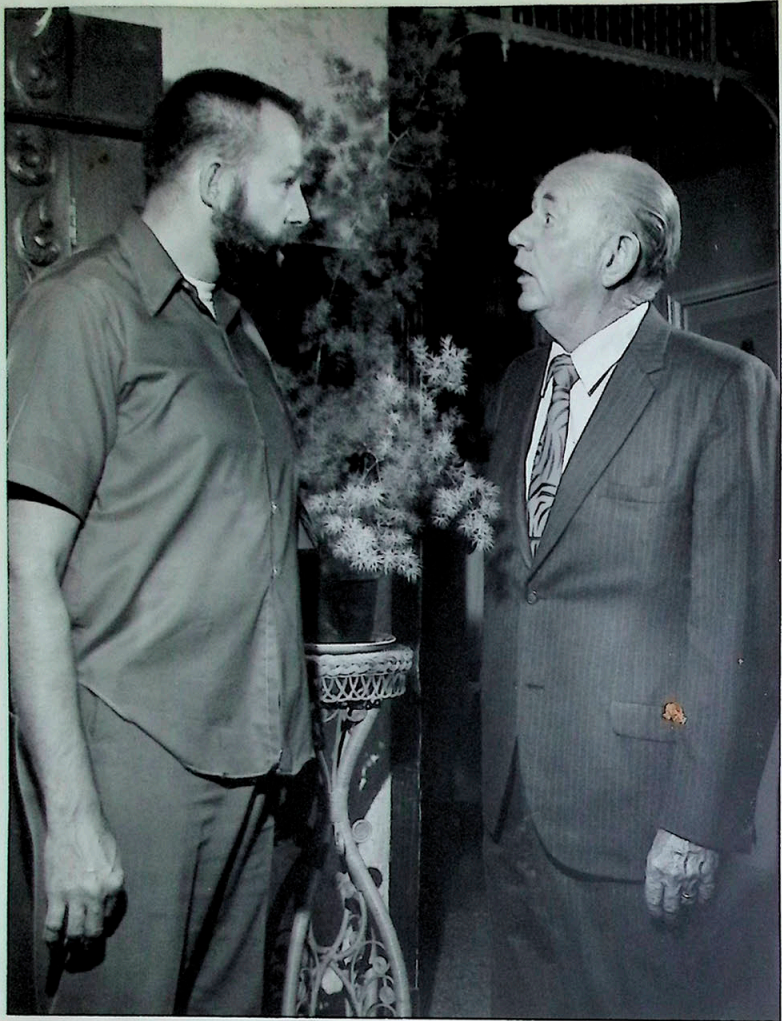
Kathy Hurt Karl Barron Georgia Benedict



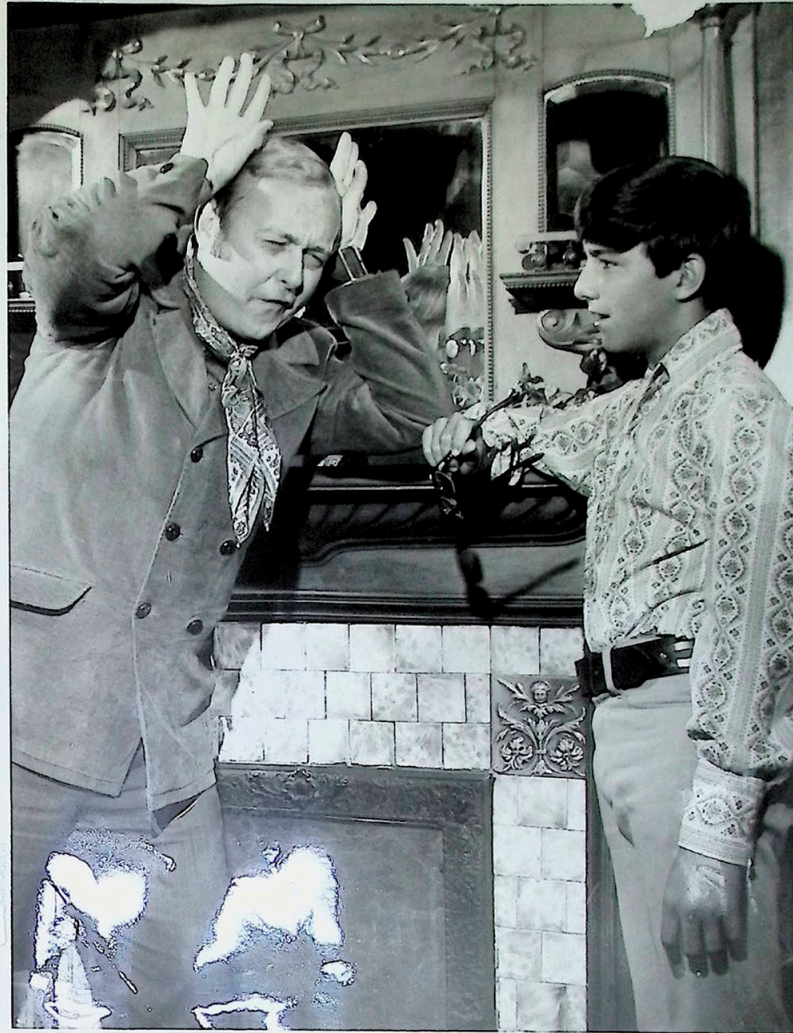
Danny Clark Karl Barron Kathy Hurt
Bob Bender Spencer Dawson Georgia Benedict



Kent Benedict Danny Clark



Jerry Annoni Harry Bauer



Fred Davis Jody Kallios



Marlene Hall Doug Wildfoerster



Jody Kallios Jerry Annoni

A LION IN WINTER
SPRING 1972

BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE GROUP PRESENTS

JAMES GOLDMAN'S

the
LION
in
WINTER

DIRECTED BY KARL BARRON



A comedy in two parts

OLD TOWN THEATRE ATTRACTS CAPACITY AUDIENCE FOR OPENING OF "THE LION IN WINTER" Benicia April 21, 1972

Capacity audiences filled the Benicia Old Town Theatre for the week-end opening of "The Lion in Winter" last Friday and Saturday. Generous applause was awarded the comedy of life in the Twelfth Century directed by Karl Barron who also played the role of Henry II.

Playgoers comments also gave special plaudits to Bob Bender, Benicia high student as John and to Georgia Taylor Benedict in the fabulous role of Eleanor of Aquitaine. Others in the stellar cast given special notice were Don Clark as Richard the Lion Hearted, Kathy Hurt as Alais, Spence Dawson as Geoffrey and Kent Benedict as King Philip of France.

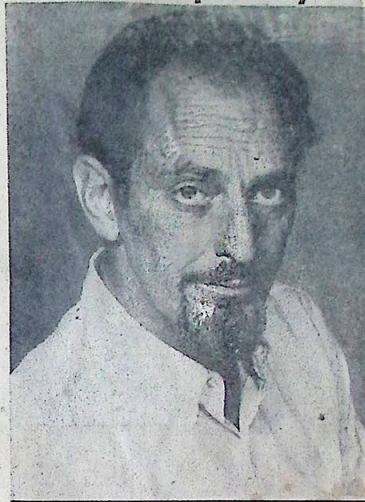
The theme of the evening was carried out in the English roast beef dinner catered by Claude Settle of the Redwood Inn. The diners gave generous appreciation to the quality of the fare and to the gaily costumed hostesses of the Old Town Theatre Group who assisted the efficient Redwood Inn staff in serving. Wine and cocktails, available from the bar, added to the pleasure of the evening.

The theatre was transformed into a medieval banquet hall by richly hued batik banners loaned by Jean Lockhart for the occasion and by unique decorations invented by Phillis Malock and Trina Tucker.

Tickets for remaining performances at \$3.50 per person for dinner and theater area available in Benicia at Village Gifts, Spruce Point and Winters & Winters or by telephoning 745-0130 during daytime hours or 745-1583 in the evening. Reservations are required.

Benicia Herald, Wednesday, April 19, 1972

Town Theatre production draws capacity audience



KARL BARRON is director and actor in the Benicia Old Town Theatre play, "The Lion in Winter." Remaining performances will be on Friday, April 21 and Saturday, April 22 and April 28 and 29. Reservations are required for this dinner theatre production.

Capacity audiences filled the Benicia Old Town Theatre for the week-end opening of "The Lion in Winter" last Friday and Saturday. Generous applause was awarded the comedy of life in the Twelfth Century directed by Karl Barron who also played the role of Henry II. Playgoers' comments also gave special plaudits to Bob Bender, Benicia High student as John and to Georgia Taylor Benedict in the fabulous role of Eleanor of Aquitaine. Others in the stellar cast given special notice were Don Clark as Richard the Lion Hearted, Kathy Hurt as Alais, Spence Dawson as Geoffrey and Kent Benedict as King Philip of France.

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No 107

Friday, April 21, 1972

NAME _____

NUMBER IN PARTY _____

PURCHASE DATE _____

TABLE RESERVATION _____

Benicia Old Town Theatre
170 West J Street, Benicia

No 107

Friday, April 21, 1972

BENICIA OLD TOWN
THEATRE GROUP

PRESENTS

"THE LION IN WINTER"

COCKTAILS	6:30	\$6.50 includes tax
DINNER	7:15	
CURTAIN	8:30	AND TIP

JAMES GOLDMAN'S The Lion In Winter

PRESENTED BY
THE BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE GROUP

DIRECTED BY
KARL BARRON

A comedy in two parts

APRIL 15 • 21-22 • 28-29

DINNER THEATRE



(tickets \$6.50) AVAILABLE AT:
WINTERS & WINTERS - Benicia 745-0130
SPRUCE POINT - Benicia 745-1112
VILLAGE GIFTS - Benicia 745-2576
WINTERS & WINTERS - Vallejo 643-5427

• Reservations Required •

No Host Cocktails 6:30
Dinner 7:15
Curtain 8:30

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group - 140 West J Street

Costumes For 'Lion In Winter'

The cast of Benicia Old Town Theatre's upcoming production of "The Lion in Winter" is now rehearsing on an almost completed set, and the period costumes designed by Marilyn Jackson and Georgia Benedict are well under way.

Velvets, furs and leathers are being used for the costumes, according to Gen Cochrane, costume chairman. Because they are cut from medieval style patterns, they are extremely voluminous, and members of the cast must have opportunity to rehearse in them.

Assisting with the costume making are Grace Bauer, Kathy Christ, Betty McFadden, Carole Hanson, Margaret Palmer, Kathy Hunt and Jeanine Higgins. The leather goods have been secured through Bob Weiden of the Weiden Leather Company in Benicia.

JEWELRY AND crowns (there are two kings, a queen, three princes) were designed by Mrs. Cochrane and Gwen Stone, artist wife of director Karl Barron.

Opening night, April 14, has been sold out to the Lowers' Wives. However, tickets to the Apr. 18, 21, 22, 28 and 29 performances are now on sale, and seating is assigned according to priority in reservations. Muster Music in Vallejo, Village Gifts, Spruce Point and Winters & Winters in Benicia have tickets available. The play is offered as part of a dinner-theater package.

Page 13 - April 21
Vallejo Times-Herald

Benicia Play Is Success

By FRANCIS FLAN

BENICIA — Palace Theatre romances of all times, magnificent sets and settings, and some of the most individual portrayals combine to make "The Lion in Winter" a production of the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's first year or so of an average community theater.

We caught the play rehearsal, when there was a scattering of writers concede that things improved with experience on hand Friday night.

The play will continue next Saturday night, the final weekend April 29. This is the tradition of the Old Town Theatre Group, with a run time at 8:30. Some for all performances available at Muster's Vallejo, Village Gifts, Winters & Winters in Benicia.

The gung-ho in "The Lion in Winter" are complete, and wholly convincing, although their might be limited in direction to the audience's individual witness.

Don't doubt, for moment that this was the in Chaucer circa 1380, as have been bawdy songs the royal family both and since.

Playwright James Goldman makes it clear he is not writing for the veracity of history, but for the drama. He was writing to entertain, not to document.

So what is important the players tell the story assigned them. They markably well, consider time differential between 1972 and 1972.

OVERBURDENED

Karl Barron, who directed the cast and is the leading role when the final selection for the play, may have overburdened himself, but that's the master of personal judgment. The king he portrays necessarily one of the most revered royal heroes; history dismisses him as a man more than the fat Richard the Lion-Hearted.

Barron's role calls for portraying a grasping woman and a king who is deep-cored about which three sons might succeed to the crown. He would as soon that is them did, if he could arrange for a more permanent form of immortality.

He responds equally scenes with his rascally with his young men played by Kathy Hurt, a magnificently regal played by Georgia Taylor, and with the prince, played by Kent Benedict.

Not in recent years has enjoyed the bearing of an actress as G. Benedict. Generally also carrying the burden of a of having been forsaken, every inch the popular of what a queen should More cannot be said.

We'd admit to some about Kathy Hurt's and really edge out Queen Eleanor in Henry's affections, but she did, under something the first law of primogeniture. The king himself favors youngest son, Eleanor then, and Geoffrey is kept on both sides making as won't be completely left.

Kent Benedict, as Philip, France, plays his role fully as a crown and a conqueror. They are their subversion so well four princes, that Henry have been more than just in lifting off their heads be threatened, and starts over again.

over again.



Richard Owen Morris - Harry Diavatis

Unique Stage Designed To Permit Better Views

BENICIA — The Old Town Theater production of "Luv" will feature a stage design new to Solano County. With a goal of better audience viewing and more effective staging, the group has constructed a "raked" stage.

The stage floor slants from the back of the stage area toward the audience creating unusual problems for the actors and set designers, but effective illusions for the audience.

Harry Diavatis, director of the production, had this to say on the "raked" stage: "Many people have the misconception that a 'raked' stage is a new concept—a new idea in theater.

"However, there are very few new conceptions in today's theater. The 'raked' or slanted stage has been with us since Elizabethan times, when Shakespeare used it for the Globe Theater. At that time theater was staged in an open arena and the floor of the stage slanted in order to allow the rain to run off. Another reason for the 'raked' stage is to increase the perspective, to make the stage appear deeper than it actually is. Because of the intensity of stage lights, it usually is necessary to make the design more dimensional to create the desired illusions.

"The 'raked' stage also gave birth to the basic stage

directions of "up stage" and "down stage" (down being toward the audience and up away from the audience).

The Old Town Theater production of "Luv" features Harry Diavatis in the dual role of actor and director;

Doris Holmes and Richard Morris. This is a cabaret theater production, and will play May 7-8, 14-15 and 21-22. Tickets are available at Munter Music in Vallejo, Village Gifts, Benicia, and the office of Winters and Winters, Benicia. Reservations are advised.



Doris Holmes - Harry Diavatis



FALL 1971
A THOUSAND CLOWNS

Concord Arts
12 Concord Co. Transcripts
Tuesday, November 9, 1971

A Thousand Clowns Bring Laughs To Theatre Goers In Benicia

By MARVA SINCLAIR

Recent little theatre goers in Benicia were once again delighted with the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production — this time Herb Gardner's three-act comedy "A Thousand Clowns."

It was directed by Harry Dayvalis of Benicia and the cast included two Concordites, Douglas Wilderster as Albert Amundson and Fred Davis as Leo Herman. Two Benicians took the roles of Sandra Markowitz and Nick Burns — Marlene Hall and Jody Kallios respectively. Murray and Arnie Burns were played by Harry Bauer and Jerry Ammon of Vallejo.

Protagonist Murray was superbly carried by Jerry Ammon, who practices dentistry between rehearsals. Devoted to community Little Theatre, Jerry made the supreme sacrifice to go before Benicia's spotlight in this production. He shaved his handsome beard to better show the facial expressions with which he brought alive the unworldly but lovable Murray. This lead role was executed with sensitivity, subtlety and successful realism, as each was required.

Marlene's "Sandra" seemed at first to be the typical prissy and clinical social worker — in complete keeping with the script. But as the plot evolves, "Sandra" emerges as a normal woman in love, impulsive in her love and de-

sires to somewhat alter the atmosphere of Murray's apartment.

"Nick," the precocious and likable pre-teenager was well done for the most part by Jody Kallios. Director Dayvalis should have worked a little harder at slowing down the longer speeches in this role. The audience missed some of Nick's precious ruminations.

Douglas Wilderster successfully portrays the role of investigator and Harry's rival as Arnie handles it quite well.

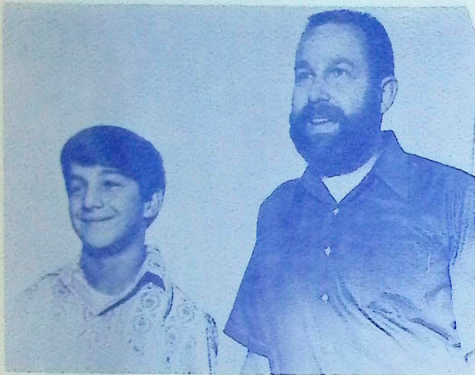
Fred Davis as the character role of Leo (Candley) at Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production, the first of the new fall season.



Barbara from REDWOOD INN

a Thousand Clowns

by Herb Gardner



Benicia Old Town Theatre Group



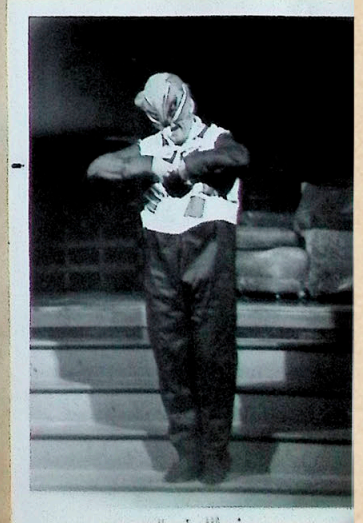
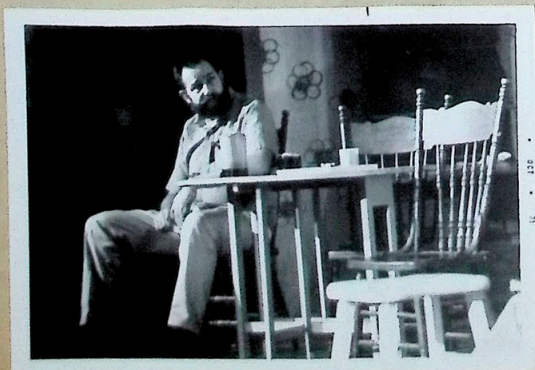
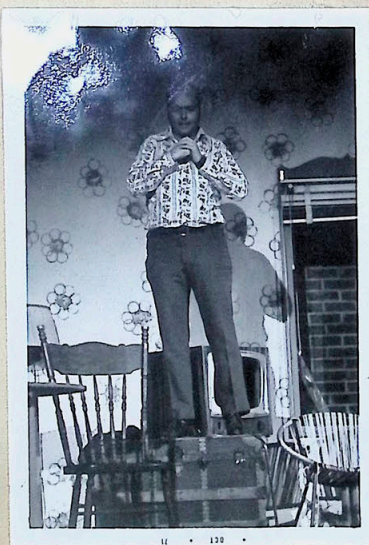
Judy Cordier



PROPER PROPS DEMAND CREATIVITY

Some plays have unusual prop problems and frequently, for community theater, the only answer is to create the needed item. Here, director Harry Dayvalis and Phyllis

Malicki check the foundation for a key prop to be used in "A Thousand Clowns." Countless hours of work have gone into the production, the first of the new fall season.





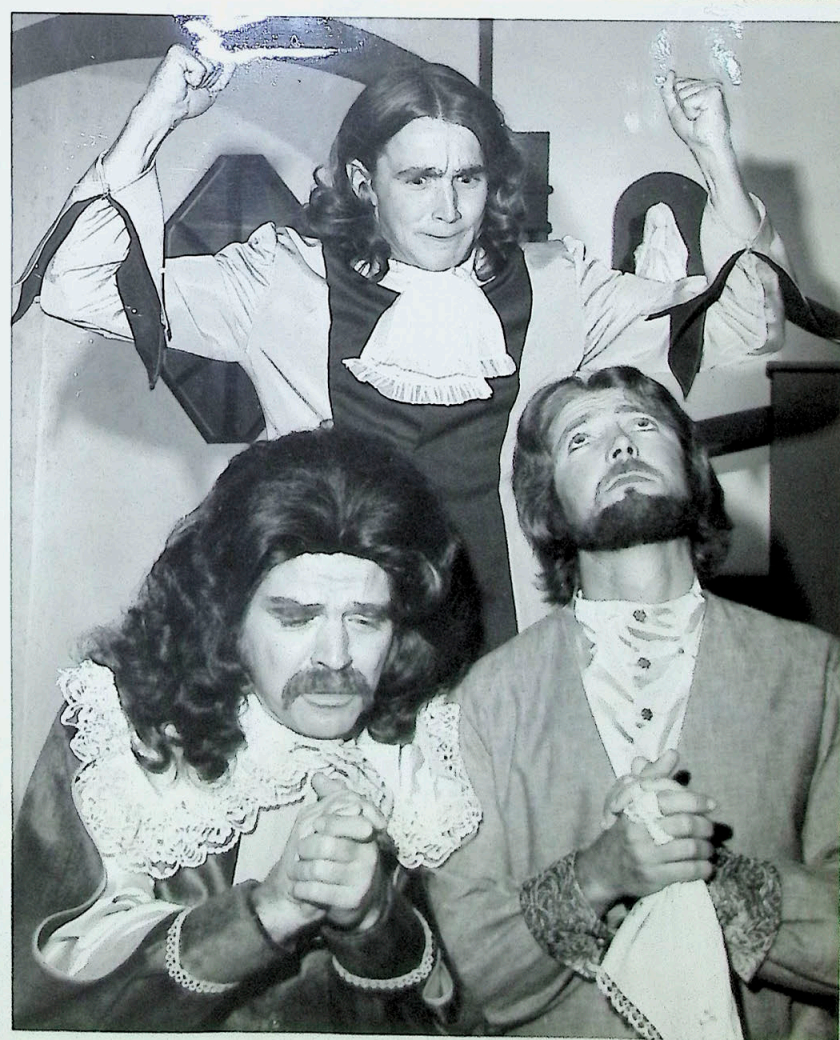
Terry Stephens Jim Harper



Danny Clark Spencer Dawson Jim Harper



Karen LeBoree Jim Harper Mary Raahauge



Jim Harper Spencer Dawson

GOOD LUCK!

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501 GEORGIA ST.
VALLEJO, CALIF. 94590

ANYTHING GOES
SPRING 1974

'Anything Goes' Everything Good

By JUDY RICHTER
DR Reporter

BENICIA—Benicia Old Town Theater Group (BOTTG) is presenting Cole Porter's "Anything Goes" to capacity audiences, and deservedly so. "Anything Goes" lives up to and enhances this local group's growing reputation as a polished, skilled company.

Although the company is amateur, the performance of two former professionals—Alma Sayles as Reno Wheeler, the nightclub singer; and Doc Scott as Moonface, the gangster—are outstanding. Miss Sayles delivers her lines and songs with all the pizzazz one expects from big-city performers.

Scott is hilarious as the tough-talking Moonface disguised as a rotund bishop. The part could have been written just for him.

Although these two highlight the 33-member cast, several BOTTG regulars turn in their usual creditable performances. Jim Harper, for example, is excellent as the Englishman, Sir Evelyn.

Because the cast is so large, however, it has room for newcomers of all ages, from students to persons in their 50's and beyond.

Another of the show's highlights is energetic, skillful dancing.

Choreographer Liz Way is to be congratulated for this important contribution to the show. Not only has she created the dances, but she's the show's best dancer, portraying Moonface's associate, Bonnie.

Director Karl Barron deserves much of the credit for this entertaining show. Music director Dalt Williams along with his student and adult musicians also add to it.

Garrett Pearson is versatile and humorous as the leading man, Billy Crocker. His pleasant tenor voice, however, doesn't project as well as it should in the musical number.

Reno's Angels—played by Susie Harper, Colleen Avilla, Pat Lutter, Judy Goldstone and Christy Duncan—add flair as the dumb blonde chorus girls.

In addition to BOTTG's reputation, another reason why "Anything Goes" is drawing large audiences is the 1920's nostalgia of such tunes as "You're the Top," "It's a Delovely," "Friendship," "I Get a Kick out of You," "Blow, Gabriel, Blow" and the title song.

Of these, "Anything Goes," "Blow Gabriel, Blow" and "Friendship" are the real show-stoppers.

Despite limited stage facilities of IDES Hall, "Anything Goes" has a visually interesting set with a variety of staging areas and levels.

Costumes designed by Gen Conradt also are excellent. Miss Sayles's several outfits are especially pleasing.

"Anything Goes" will close this Friday and Saturday after six previous performances.

Since it is dinner-theater, 2½ hour advance reservations are required.

They may be made at Winters & Winters, 745-0130, Wolff's Drugs, 745-1355, Benicia; or Munter Music, 5427, in Vallejo.

No-host cocktails begin 6:30 p.m., dinner at 7:15 and curtain at 8:30 p.m.

'Anything Goes' goes well Town Theater show records smash hit

BY BOB SILVA
Editor, Benicia Herald

The Benicia Old Town Theater Group's "Anything Goes" turned its most ambitious production ever into a smashing triumph here last weekend when it presented Cole Porter's "Anything Goes" to a delighted audience at IDES Hall Saturday night.

Hardly does a small town theatre group embark on an undertaking such as a lavish musical, but the BOTTG, noted for its daring in previous productions, has done just that and the result is an easy to look at, pleasant to hear show that deserves full houses throughout its run.

There are several shining performances in the whimsical adventure about a liner sailing for London, but the sparkler of the show is Alma Sayles who plays the lead role of Reno Sweeney, a bit of a seamy whose scheme saves a love affair for two young passengers while she acquires some "security" for herself.

The great Ethel Merman is said to have launched her budding career into orbit by her portrayal of Reno in 1933 on Broadway. Miss Sayles' voice doesn't have the Merman "twinkle," but it is rich and clear. If Miss Sayles doesn't quite match Merman's voice, Merman doesn't come close to the Sayles' look. The lady is simply a "looker." She's a fine comedienne, dances a bit, leads three production numbers with the entire cast and completely dazzles the lucky viewers.

Let's I get carried away with one show-stopper, allow me to mention a few others who put it all-together, and had the audience interrupting the fun with outbreaks of applause on at least four occasions.

Doc Scott played a character named Moonface, as Hope are the two lovers who are brought together by the conniving Reno, Moon-

face and others. The two turn in polished performances. Pearson sings several numbers, but seemed overwhelmed in this department by Miss Sayles and Miss Opperud who also captivated the audience with a quality voice.

Liz Way, who did the choreography for the play, and earth's considerable praise for first place, also played the role of Nakey Bonnie, Moonface's moll. Miss Way was at her best in a sexy rock-hound, one of the several spots in the play that produced unrestrained applause.

There were others — Jim Harper who played Sir Evelyn with an effective flair who "lost" Hope and won Reno. And there were four "Angels," Virtue, Purity, Chastity and Charity (Susie Harper, Colleen Avilla, Judy Goldstone, and Christy Duncan) whose purpose on stage wasn't always understandable, but whose legs made it all forgettable.

It's unfair, I suppose, to mention the director, Karl Barron, for the first time way down here, but he's been around and had to know he had a winner. This one has to be among his best. One couldn't watch the constant activity and changing scenes without acquiring a strong appreciation for the many hours of labor that had gone into the show.

The costumes designed by Gen Conradt are fine and the gowns and dresses worn by Miss Sayles and Miss Opperud are lavish and beautiful.

Dalt Williams directed the music and it was flawless as far as I could tell. The people on stage certainly appeared to like it.

The set was remarkable, considering the small confines of the IDES stage. Various scenes on the ship were cleverly produced by revolving backdrops. Mark Johnson was in charge.

The real appeal of the show is not one person, or a few — but the entire cast. The people obviously enjoyed themselves on the



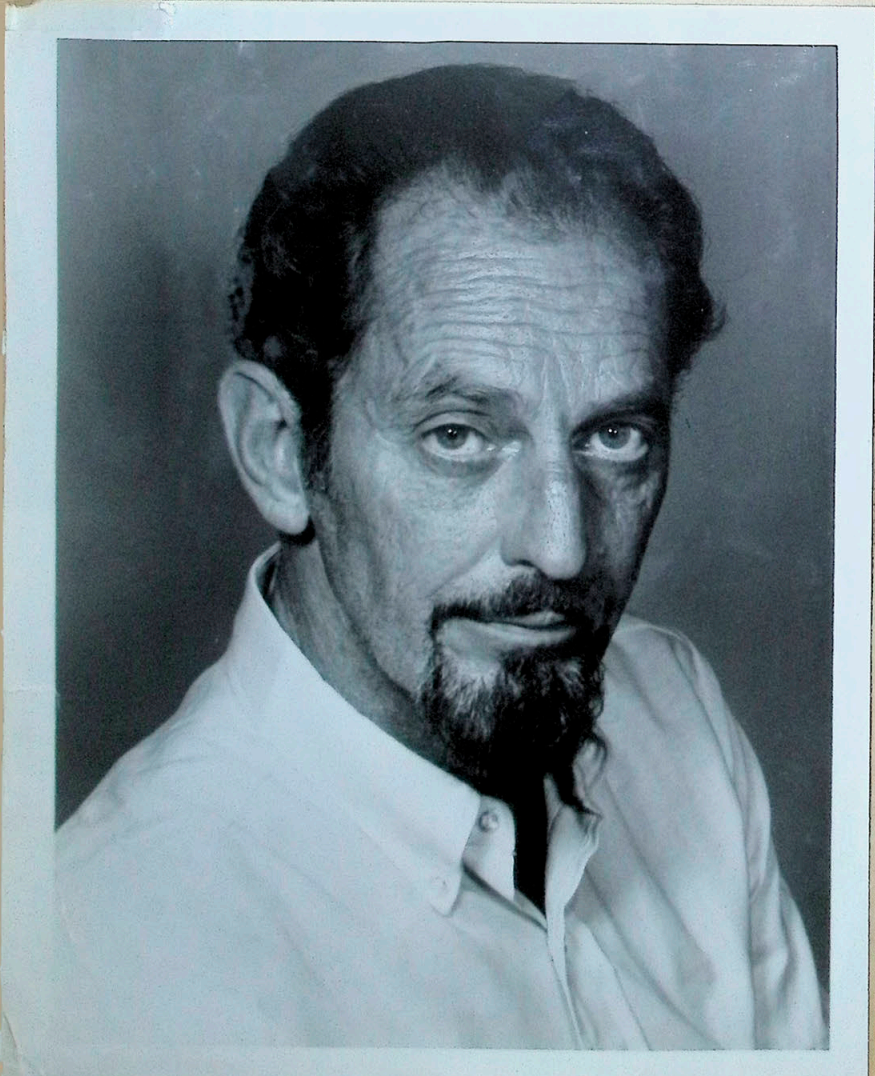
SAILORS KEVIN KEARNS and Dan Russo admire Reno Sweeney's fair angel Pat Litter, Judy Goldstone, Susie Harper and Christ Duncan in Benicia Old Town Theatre's performance of "Anything Goes."

stage (the encouragement from the audience had to help too) and it all seemed infectious. It was a great show — the best I've seen here.

Near the end of the first act, the entire ensemble jumped to a rollicking "Anything Goes" number. The dancing and movement on the stage caused a piece of curtain, covering stage lights, to fall; but it didn't detract the playmen. They kept dancing while they were "bringing down the house."

It seemed appropriate.

The play continues on May 17, 18, 24, 25, 31 and June 1. Reservations can be made at Winters & Winters, 745-0130 or Wolff's Drugs, 745-1355 in Benicia.





Sue Harper



Roy Harper Fanya Silverman



Norma Sharon Bob Smith Bob Jordan



Alma Sayles As Renee Sweeney

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group Tenth Year Anniversary

1964-1974

DEADWOOD DICK Our Town Forty! Harvey
Tartuffs Dimmy & the Witches Lion in Winter
Anniversary Waltz Anything Goes
A Thousand Clowns The Tavern
The Girls in 500 TEN NIGHTS IN A BARROOM
Dark of the Moon LUV the time of your life

Both Cast, Audience Enjoy '10 Nights In A Barroom'

By JIMMIE JONES
Times Herald
Entertainment Editor

A handsome souvenir program marks the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's tenth anniversary but perhaps the current production of "Ten Nights In A Barroom" more suitably illustrates the group's goals and successes.

This musical comedy version of a temperance drama certainly spells out one of the group's aims — to do shows that both the cast and the audience will enjoy. And they do.

The production isn't quite up to last season's musical success "Anything Goes" but the fault lies more with the material than the cast.

The show is a spoof of those dreadful dramas that were supposed to illustrate the dangers of drink, yet could only be made bearable by a good stiff snort or two.

Tom Blank's direction is a bit heavyhanded and the show would be more effective if weren't treated quite so campy, but there's plenty to enjoy. The situations are familiar to anyone who's ever seen a melodrama.

GREEDY OWNER
The setting is the Sickle and Sheaf tavern where owner Simon Slade (Danny Clark) counts his money instead of the men his bar has ruined. Mark Johnson plays his son, Frank, who adopts the evil habits of smoking, drinking and women chasing, while Penelope Masengil is the long-suffering wife who was much happier "back at the old mill."

Regular customers at the den of iniquity include villain Harvey Green (Doc Scott) who bilks the wealthy scion of town's leading family, Willie Hammons (Steve Andressen) by cheating at cards, and Joe Morgan (Garret Pearson) an honest but alcoholic family man whose young daughter Mary (Jackie Chalmers) must come fetch him home from the saloon each evening. Into their lives comes barroom singer Goldie Hills (Rhea Leonard) who senses the tragedy awaiting each

drinker and tries to save them from an evil end.

Musical numbers include "There is a Tavern in the Town," "The Man Who Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo," "St. Louis Blues," "My Sweetheart's the Man in the Moon," "After You've Gone," "No! No! A Thousand Times No!," "She's More to Be Pityed Than Censured," "Pretty Baby," and "Look For the Silver Lining," most rendered effectively and a few not.

SPECIAL MENTION
The cast is large and individual criticisms are impossible in the space available. Still, special mention is de-

served in the case of Garret Pearson as the hapless Joe Morgan, Jackie Chalmers as his scene-stealing daughter and Linda Barron as the coquettish and empty-headed Mehitabel. Oneta Feeney's piano artistry adds much to the flavor of the production.

Six also acts open the show with good effect. Particularly funny is Carla Janssen's sly act on roller skates. Penny Masengil's plaintive rendition of "Walter, Walter, Lead Me To The Altar" and Lynnel Velho, a natural comedienne who did a bit as Gracie Allen and substituted in a soft shoe number.

10TH ANNIVERSARY
FALL 1974

THE BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE GROUP

proudly presents

TEN NIGHTS IN A BARROOM

A musical comedy version
of the
Famous Temperance Drama
by
William W. Pratt
Adapted by Fred Carmichael

Directed by Tom Blank who was assisted by Nancy Gonsalves

Musical Director . . . Oneta Feeney

Producer . . . Norman Gonsalves, Jr.

OLIOS

George and Gracie . . . Lynnel Velho, Steve Andressen
Dainty June . . . Beth Montez, Andy Tozier, Tom Ryan
Harvest Moon . . . Terri Obrecht, Greg Parks
Take Me Out To the Ball Game . . . Elaine Seput, Ron Gonsalves
Tea For Two (Bea Lilly) . . . Carla Janssen, Greg Parks, Steve Andressen, Andy Tozier, Mark Johnson
Walter . . . Penny Masengil

THE CAST (In order of appearance)

Romaine . . . Mitchell Lane
Sample . . . Larry Hines
Simon Slade . . . Danny Clark
Frank Slade . . . Mark Johnson
Harvey Green . . . "Doc" Scott
Willie Hammons . . . Steve Andressen
Tommy . . . Ron Gonsalves
Mrs. Slade . . . Penelope Masengil
Goldie Hills . . . Rhea Leonard
Joe Morgan . . . Garret Pearson
Romaine . . . Jackie Chalmers
Sample . . . Linda Barron
Simon Slade . . . Norma Shuren
Frank Slade . . . Terri Obrecht
Harvey Green . . . Elaine Seput
Willie Hammons . . . Lynnel Ann Velho
Tommy . . . Carla Janssen
Mrs. Slade . . . Andy Tozier
Goldie Hills . . . Dan Brown
Joe Morgan . . . Mary R. Wedding
Piano . . . Oneta Feeney
Banjo . . . John Annal

ACT ONE

Scene 1 - Exterior of Sickle and Sheaf Inn.
Scene 2 - Within said Sickle and Sheaf
Scene 3 - A Bucolic Setting
Scene 4 - The Sickle and Sheaf
Scene 5 - The Sickle and Sheaf
Scene 6 - The Sickle and Sheaf
Scene 7 - The Sickle and Sheaf
Scene 8 - The Sickle and Sheaf
Scene 9 - The Sickle and Sheaf
Scene 10 - The Sickle and Sheaf

ACT TWO

Scene 1 - The Home of Joe Morgan
Scene 2 - The Sickle and Sheaf
Scene 3 - At the Water's Edge
Scene 4 - The Sickle and Sheaf
Scene 5 - The Sickle and Sheaf
Scene 6 - The Sickle and Sheaf
Scene 7 - The Sickle and Sheaf
Scene 8 - The Sickle and Sheaf
Scene 9 - The Sickle and Sheaf
Scene 10 - The Sickle and Sheaf

ACT THREE

Scene 1 - The Home of Joe Morgan
Scene 2 - The Sickle and Sheaf
Scene 3 - The Sickle and Sheaf
Scene 4 - The Sickle and Sheaf
Scene 5 - The Sickle and Sheaf
Scene 6 - The Sickle and Sheaf
Scene 7 - The Sickle and Sheaf
Scene 8 - The Sickle and Sheaf
Scene 9 - The Sickle and Sheaf
Scene 10 - The Sickle and Sheaf

Produced by special arrangement with Samuel French, Inc.

NOTE: NO RECORDING OR FLASH PICTURES - PLEASE!

'Ten Nights in a Barroom' Reviewed

By JUDY RICHTER
DR Reporter

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group (BOTG) is celebrating its 10th anniversary with a melodrama, "Ten Nights in a Barroom," billed as a musical comedy version of a temperance drama by William Pratt.

Judging by opening night Oct. 19, however, BOTG fans might find this production falls short of the high standards set by previous offerings, most notably "Anything Goes" this past spring.

This remark must be tempered with the observation that recent performances have proved this amateur group capable of polished work comparable with that of many professional groups.

Furthermore, "Ten Nights in a Barroom" has no shortage of laugh-filled scenes.

Director Tom Blank, whose credits include summer experience with American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco, has injected some deft touches like stop action and exaggeration to produce moments of delightfully corny camp.

Unfortunately, some of these touches don't go far enough. For example, timing and lighting need work and the Sickle and Sheaf Tavern scenes seem crowded.

Casting Judgment
Finally, one questions the casting judgment. Although most of the actors seem able physically suited for their parts.

Except for casting, these mentioned flaws either result from opening night jitters or can be worked out for subsequent presentations.

On the plus side are some fine performances by Doc Scott as the villain Harvey Green, Steve Andressen as Willie Hammons, whom Green leads astray; Larry Hines as Sample, Willie's bumptious bodyguard; Penny Masengil as Mrs. Slade, wife of the tavern

keeper; Norma Sharon as Mrs. Morgan, wife of the town drunk; and Linda Barron as Mehitabel, Sample's fiancée.

Youngsters Ron Gonsalves as Tommy, the shoeshine boy; Lynnel Ann Velho as Sherry, one of Mehitabel's sisters and Jackie Chalmers as Mary Morgan, the drunk's crippled

daughter; hold their own with the adults and show promise of providing a solid BOTG core in years to come.

Background piano playing by Oneta Feeney and banjo playing by John Annal are outstanding.



TEETOTALER Romaine (left), played by Mitchell Lane, refuses the temptation offered by tavern owner Simon Slade, played by Danny Clark, in Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of the melodrama, "Ten Nights in a Barroom."

—Special Photo

Not to be overlooked on the plus side, are the six old-fashioned vaudeville acts at the beginning of the evening.

Although each is well done and amusing, the "Tea for Two (Bea Lilly)" routine with Greg Parks, Steve Andressen, Andy Tozier, Mark Johnson and a roller-skating Carla Janssen is downright hilarious.

Therefore—despite the kinds

of flaws which one doesn't expect from BOTG and which may be worked out this week—"Ten Nights in a Barroom" does add up to an enjoyable evening.

As is traditional with BOTG, this is dinner-theater with reservations required. Tickets costing \$7.50 may be reserved by telephoning 745-0130, 745-1355 or 643-5427.

ELECTRONIC KITS

NEW YORK (UPI) — Electronic kits available for youngsters range from those teaching the child fundamentals of electricity to those showing, step by step, how to make a magnet, a telegraph set or even a radio.

T. H. Oct. 27, 1974



DIRECTING the music for Benicia Old Town Theatre Guild's melodrama, "Ten Nights in a Barroom" is Oneta Feeney, above. Tom Blank directs the play, which continues two more weekends.

Melodrama In Benicia

Oneta Feeney, long-time Benicia resident, is the Musical Director for the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group production of "Ten Nights in A Barroom."

You may call Oneta for reservations at Winters and Winters in Benicia, where she is currently employed. The play continues November 1, 2, 3 (matinee), 5, and 6.

Benicia Herald, Vallejo, Sunday, October 13, 1974



BENICIA MELODRAMA OPENS SATURDAY

Rhea Leonard of Vallejo performs as Goldie Hills, the dance-hall girl with a "heart of gold" accompanied by Steve Andressen, Benicia, on the piano, in the Benicia Old Town Theatre's upcoming musical melodrama "Ten Nights in a Barroom." The dinner-theater production opens Saturday, Oct. 19 and runs

through Saturday, Nov. 9 with Friday and Saturday night performances. There will also be a matinee performance on Sunday, Nov. 3 (no dinner). Reservations may be made by calling Munter Music, 643-5427 or Winters & Winters, at 745-0130, in Benicia.



ANGEL OF Benicia Old Town Theatre's current production is Jackie Chalmers, age ten.

Melodrama Has 2 More Shows

Jackie Chalmers, a ten-year-old fifth grade student at Pennycook School, plays "Little Mary" in the Benicia Old Town Theatre production of "Ten Nights in a Barroom." Hard work and busy schedules are not new to Jackie, as she has participated in several Vallejo Group productions — "Sound of Music" and "Fiddler on the Roof" to name two. Jackie also enjoys her aerobics class, where she injured herself just prior to opening, and hence goes on stage in a leg cast which is all too real. However, the show must go on, and does for two more performances Nov. 8 and 9 in Benicia.

Tiff. No. 0.3 1974

Benicia Herald BOITG musical features specialty olio numbers

Al Jolson, George Burns and Gracie Allen and Bea Lillie to appear in Benicia. Sounds impossible but these are just a few of the numbers planned for the Benicia Old Town Theater Group's upcoming production of "Ten Nights in a Barroom," according to director Tom Banks.

People performing in olios or specialty numbers between the acts of the musical melodrama include Beth Montez of Benicia as Baby June with her dancing cow; Garrett Pearson, Crockett, as Al Jolson; Penny Massengill, Vallejo, as Gracie Fields; and Carla Jansen, Benicia, impersonating Bea Lillie.

Other acts include Steve Andressen, Pleasant Hill, and Lynnel Velho, Benicia, as

the inimitable George Burns and Gracie Allen, and a soft shoe routine of "Harvest Moon" starring Nora Bayes, assisted and admired by Jack Norworthy, otherwise known as Elaine Seput, Benicia, and Greg Park, Fairfield.

Chorus boys are Tom Ryan, Benicia; Mark Johnson, Vallejo; Steve Andresson and Andy Tozier, Benicia.

Oneita Feeney, Benicia, is the musical director for the temperance melodrama which opens on October 19 and runs through November 9 with Friday and Saturday night performances.

Oneita will be assisted by Benician John Annal, banjo virtuoso.

Other crew members are Nancy Gonsalves, assistant director; Mitch Lane, Vallejo, sound and lights; and Teryl Obrochia, Pleasant Hill, costumes. Norman Gonsalves, Jr., is producing the play.

Director Tom Banks, who is new to the Benicia scene, worked with ACT's Summer Congress this year. Tom, who teaches at the Immaculate Conception Academy, a private school in San Francisco, also moonlights as a singing waiter at the Red Garter on Broadway in San Francisco where he lives. He has directed two melodramas previously and played the lead in "George M." two summers ago. He said that he was particularly interested in American theater of the early 1900's and finds Benicia a perfect setting for this type of production.

Reservations for the dinner-theater production may be made by calling Winters and Winters, 745-0130 or Wolf's City Drug Store, 745-1355.

Benicia Herald Oct. 24, 1974



Among the Benicians in the cast of the Benicia Old Town Theaters Groups' current production, Ten Nights In A Barroom, are Norma Sharon, Danny Clark and Beth Montez. The play, a temperance melodrama, opened last Saturday to enthusiastic crowds and will continue weekends until November 9. A Sunday Matinee is scheduled for November 3 with curtain time at 7:30 and tickets priced at \$3.00. Tickets priced at \$7.50 each for all other performances, which includes dinner, may be obtained by calling Wolf's City Drug at 745-1355 or Winters and Winters, 745-0130.

Benicia Old Town Theater Group
presents

TEN NIGHTS in a BARROOM

by
William W. Pratt

Oct. 19*25*26 Nov. 1*2*8*9
Matinee Nov. 3; 7:30 Curtain \$3.00

Directed and Choreographed by
Tom Blank
Musical Direction by Oneita Feeney

Reservations:
Winters & Winters; 745-0131
Wolf's "City Drugs" 745-1355
Munter Music 643-5427
Cocktails 6:30
Dinner 7:15
Curtain 8:30
Tickets \$7.50

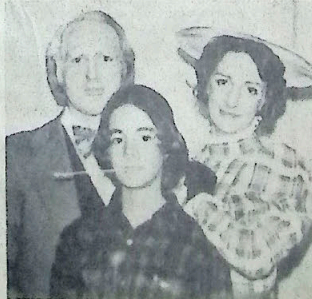
Benicia Herald
Oct. 17, 1974
Located 140 West "J",
off First Street

Benicia Herald Oct. 31, 1974

Hi-jinks at IDES Hall



Harvey Green, villain, played by Doc Scott poses above with Rhea Leonard, portraying Goldie Hills, the saloon girl with "a heart of gold," in Benicia Old Town Theater Group's current production, "Ten Nights In A Bar Room." At the right Remaine, played by Mitchell Lane, Penny Massengill in the role of Mrs. Salde, wife of the Tavern Owner and Ron Gonsalves, starring as Tommy the shoe shine boy, assume a serious pose contemplating the effects of alcohol.



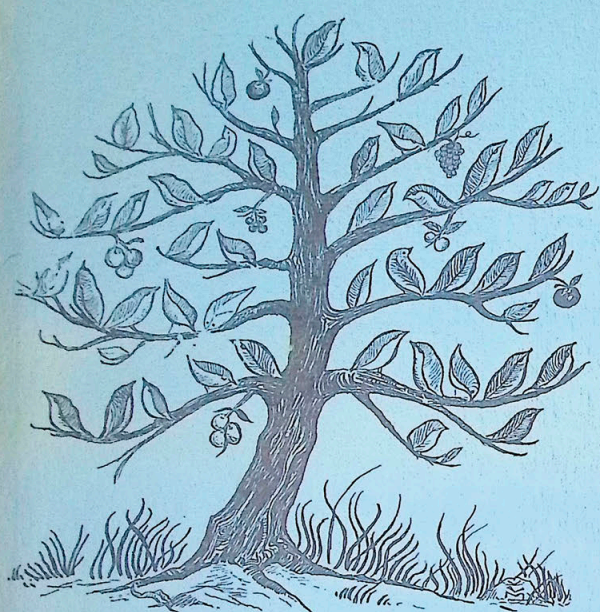
Centro Costa Times Oct. 17, 1974



Melodrama in Benicia

Country bumpkin Simon Swiche (Larry Hines of Martine) woo his heart's desire, Mahitabel (Linda Barton of Benicia) in the Benicia Old Town Theater's musical, "Ten Nights in a Barroom," opening Friday at the IDES Hall and playing weekends through Nov. 9. For reservations to the dinner-theater production call (707) 745-0130 or (707) 745-1355.

THE HOUSE OF BLUE LEAVES
SPRING 1975



THE BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE GROUP PRESENTS:

"THE HOUSE OF BLUE LEAVES"

BY JOHN GUARE

DIRECTED BY: KARL BARRON





Kathy Metcalfe Norma Sharon T. Stephens Nancy Gonsalves



T. Michael Ryan

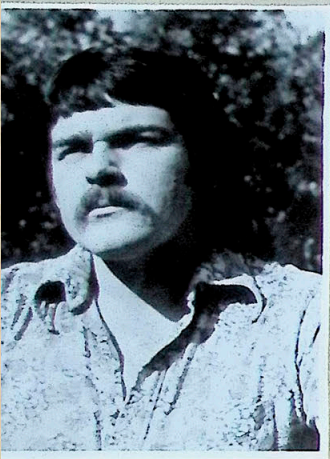


Kariyn Frelick Norman Gonsalves, JR.



Penny Massengill David Altman

FALL 1975
SEE HOW THEY RUN



The Richter Scale

Judy Richter

City Editor

Hilarious Benicia Show Adds Up To Entertainment Bargain

BENICIA—A full evening's entertainment for a reasonable price is provided by Benicia Old Town Theater Group's (BOTG) "See How They Run."

This fall dinner-theater production, an English farce by Philip King, kept its opening night audience Friday laughing from start to finish with fine comic performances.

The show is a worthy addition to BOTG's growing reputation as an outstanding community theater group.

Directed by David Roster, the show opens humorously with the silent efforts of Gay Grooms as Ida, the maid, dusting a chandelier. Immediately one realizes she's one of the strongest members of the cast.

Other able performers are Mary Barry as Miss Skillon, Danny Clark as the Rev. Lionel Toop, Linda Barron as Penelope Toop, Matt Purvis as Clive, and Roy Harper as The Rev. Arthur Humphrey.

Clark's performance should be especially gratifying to BOTG fans. Although he has been featured in nearly every recent BOTG production, this is his best effort to date.

Set in an English village vicarage, "See How They Run" involves disguises and mistaken identities as the vicar's wife, Penelope, goes out with a long-time acting friend, Clive, recently stationed at a nearby American air base.

Eager to discredit Penelope,

formerly an American actress is the prudish Miss Skillon who still has designs on Vicar Toop. All her pique is rapidly punctured when she gets drunk on cooking sherry.

Complicating matters, two other ministers—Humphrey and the Bishop of Lax (Roy Harper)—Penelope's uncle—arrive early, and an escaped Russian spy (Karyn Stodgell) arrives unexpectedly.

There's a lot of hiding in the closet and chasing around—all quite hilarious for the most part.

However, the hilarity got out of hand toward the end of the second act as the pace and pitch snowballed frantically.

One assumes the cast was caught up in the audience's favorable response. Undoubtedly that's easy for amateurs to do.

With one exception, though, the cast recovered nicely for the third act.

That exception was Harper who seemed to set things off during the second act by yelling nearly every line. He had nowhere to go when the play really required yelling.

Preceding the show is a catered prime rib dinner. It's not gourmet fare, but it's adequate.

When the dinner is considered along with such an entertaining show, the ticket price of \$7.50 stands out as a real bargain in these inflationary days. That Benicia is only about 20 miles from here commends it even more as a bargain.

"See How They Run" will continue at IDES Hall, 125 W. J St. here, Fridays and Saturdays through Nov. 22 with a non-dinner show costing \$3.75 p.m. Nov. 9.

The dinner-theater schedule includes no-host cocktails at 6:30 p.m., dinner at 7:15 p.m. and curtain at 8:30 p.m.

Reservations may be made with Winters & Winters, 745-0139, or Wolf's Drugs, 745-0139, in Benicia; or Munter's, 643-5477, in Vallejo.



IDA, THE MAID (Gay FGrooms) gives her opinion of village spinster-gossip Miss Skillon (Mary Barry) as the latter awaits an audience with the vicar during this early scene from Benicia Old Town Theater Group's production of "See How They Run," a farce by Philip King.

BOTG Photo

Strictly Show Biz!

By JIMMIE JONES
Entertainment Editor

British clergymen have always provided ripe pickings for humorists but seldom has the village vicar been more successfully skewered than in the current production of "See How They Run" by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group.

Wild, unrestrained farce generally describes the action centering in the vicarage at Merton-Cum-Middlewick where the Rev. Lionel Toop strives to keep peace between his parishioners, particularly a vocal old maid, and his American-born wife who finds the religious life a bloody bore after some years performing on the stage.

To say Saturday night's audience enjoyed the show is an understatement. They literally rolled in the aisles for much of the second and third acts and left exhausted from howling at the improbable action on stage—and some unseen encounters taking place in a convenient closet.

Such plays generally generate much of their humor by puncturing pompous figures and this one is no exception. The Rev. Mr. Toop spends much of the play running around in his underwear after his clerical threads are stolen by an intruder. The Bishop of Lax runs around in his nightshirt and winds up in a gooseberry patch. The wife's ex-acting "friend" just runs around—looking for his military uniform.

Much of the hijinks are predictable but director David Roster has infused the creaking vehicle with a number of sight gags that do wonders in freshening the plot.

The actors aren't a bit restrained and a little bit of scenery chewing goes a long way. It's doubtful if more than a handful of the audience noticed, or cared, however.

The acting is generally acceptable if overblown. Linda Barron, as the vicar's wife, is lovely and her good looks more than make up for a slight stiffness in her characterization. Danny Clark handled the comic aspects of his portrayal of the vicar with ease but I would have liked to see a better British accent and manner. Mary Barry had fun with the spinster Miss Skillon and Gay Grooms stole the show with a windy rendition of a cockney maid.

Her accent was so good everyone else suffered in comparison. Matt Purvis, Roy Harper, Bill Barron and Steve Houghton were fine in supporting roles but Karyn Stodgell was miscast as the intruder. Having a woman play the part is a joke that doesn't work.

The dinner theatre offering continues weekends at the IDES Hall through Nov. 22.



BY PHILIP KING
A OLD TOWN THEATER GROUP

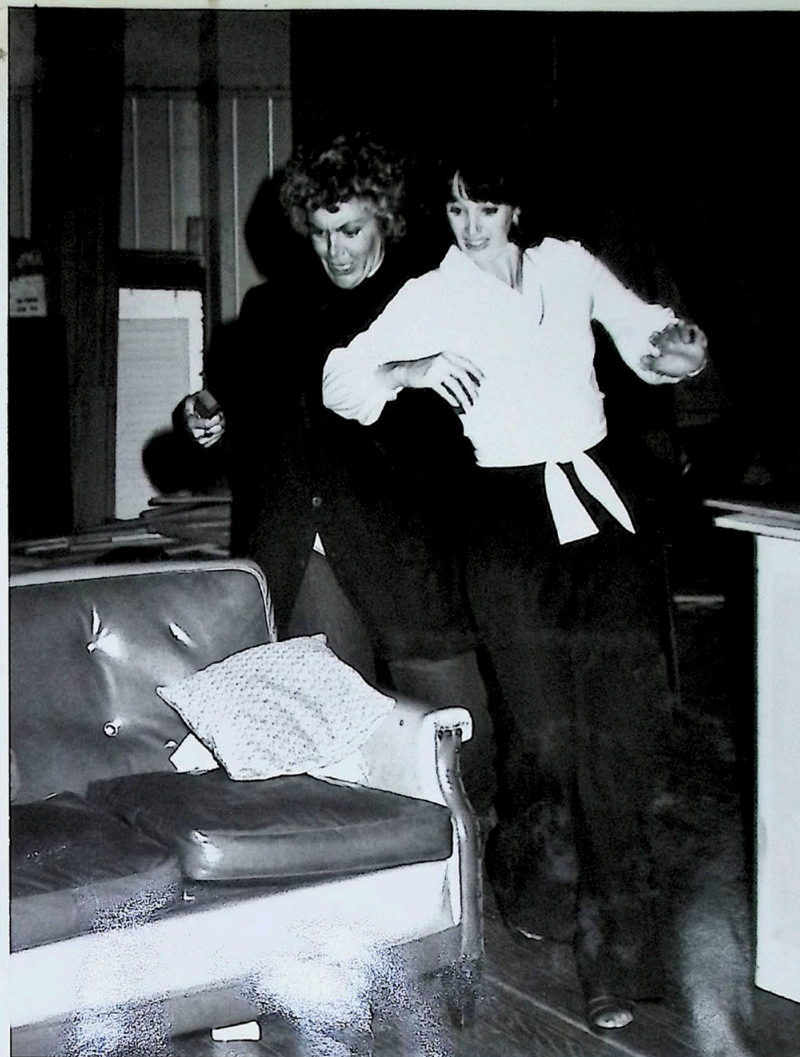


K. Stodgell

Roy Harper - Mary Barry
Danny Clark - Linda Barron - Mat Purvis



Mat Purvis Danny Clark Karyn Stodgell



Linda Barron



Danny Clark - Linda Barron Mat Purvis - Gay Grooms



Danny Clark Mary Barry Gay Grooms

The Daily Republic, Fairfield
4/15/76



DIRECTOR Ken Hein fills in as Corp. Billy Jester in this rehearsal scene with Marilyn Jackson as Nancy in Benicia Old Town Theater Group's dinner-theater production of "Little Mary Sunshine." —BOTG Photo

The Richter Scale

Judy Richter

City Editor

Benicia Group Presents 'Little Mary Sunshine'

BENICIA—Once again Benicia Old Town Theater Group (BOTG) here has put together a thoroughly delightful dinner show.

This time it's a musical, Rick Besoyan's "Little Mary Sunshine," and it has everything going for it: singing, acting, dancing, costuming, setting and all the other theatrical details.

Directed by Ken Hein, the show is well cast in virtually every role.

This comment from Saturday's show includes the music, directed by Kristy Barber. Only one minor character doesn't sing well, but he makes up for it by moving well.

Liz Way's choreography also is effective. Although most of the actors do not seem to be trained dancers, she tailored the dances to their abilities.

THIS SEEMS to follow a wise dictum: better to do a simple thing well than botch up something more difficult.

"Little Mary Sunshine" spoofs movies of the Jeanette MacDonald-Nelson Eddy genre.

The heroine, Little Mary, is an innocent young woman trying to maintain The Colorado Inn in the Rockies during the early 1900s.

The hero, Capt. Jim, is a forest ranger commanding a patrol of six men. He's devoted to duty and chivalrous toward Mary.

His assistant is Corp. Billy Jester, who has a crush on Mary's maid, Nancy, the local flirt.

Other characters include assorted Indians and inn guests like a German operative

soprano and a bevy of Eastern finishing school girls.

AFTER SOME complications, everything turns out happily ever after.

Jim Harper is warmly masculine as Capt. Jim, while Claudia Barr is appropriately demure as Mary. Both sing and act well.

Bill Barron and Marilyn Jackson portray Billy Jester and Nancy with comic flair. They could steal the show if they wanted to.

The show features lots of upbeat music, which the cast and pianists Kristin Harper and Barber handle with ease.

Because it's a spoof, the cast could easily play for laughs, exaggerating some of the corner, more clichéd lines.

Instead the actors consistently maintain that fine line between burlesque and seriousness to achieve a humorous understatement—the quiet chuckle rather than the raucous guffaw.

THE SET is attractive and elaborate. Rather than confining it to the main and side stages, set designer Bill Hay has extended it with a separate small platform in the upper third of the hall.

Though furnished only with a garden bench, it creates a three-quarter-round that brings the actors much closer to the audience. This effect is further enhanced by using the back of the hall for some entrances and exits.

Other strengths of the show are fast pacing, deft scene changes and classy costumes.

The dinner catered by a Vallejo restaurant is good, too.

In short, this production has everything needed for an evening's enjoyment at a reasonable cost, \$8.50 a person including dinner.

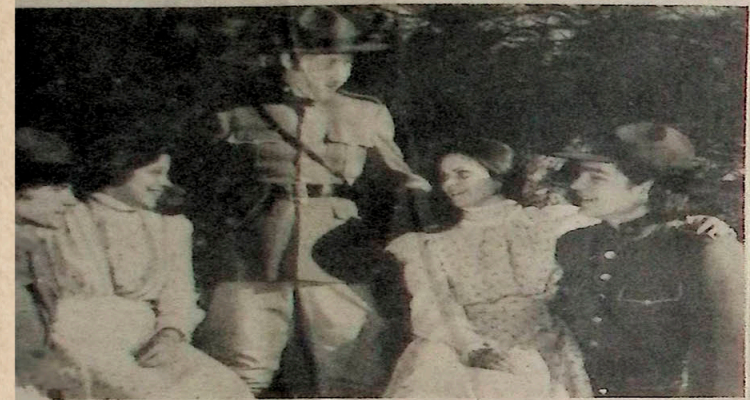
But then, people familiar with BOTG have come to expect this sort of thing. The reviewer has not been disappointed by any of its previous seven productions.

"LITTLE MARY Sunshine" will continue at IDES Hall, 14 W. J St. here, Fridays and Saturdays through May 8. No host cocktails are 6:30 p.m., dinner 7:15 p.m. and curtain 8:30 p.m.

A non-dinner performance is scheduled 7:30 p.m. April 25.

Reservations may be made with Winters & Winters, 744 0130, or Wolff's Drugs, 745-1353 in Benicia; or Minter Music 643-5427, in Vallejo.

Nelson Eddy, where are you?



Forest rangers are delighted to find young ladies from an eastern girls' school in the mountains in the Benicia Old Town Theater Group's production of "Little Mary Sunshine" opening April 10. Jamie Hamblett, Missy Tucker, Bill Barron, Joanne Arruda and Tom Ryan shown above are part of the group of rangers and are featured in the production.

Presented as dinner theatre, the musical comedy with book, music and lyrics by Rick Besoyan will continue on Friday and Saturday evenings through May 8. The evening sessions with no-host cocktails at 6:30, dinner 7:15 and curtain at 8:30. Tickets are \$8 and are available at Winters & Winters (745-0130) and Wolff's Drugs (745-1353) in Benicia. A non-dinner performance with reduced prices will be held Sunday, April 11. Reservations are required for the dinner evenings.

A delighted Oscar



"Oscar" U.S. Army sergeant's attention of his two "girls," Missy Tucker and the Benicia Old Town Theater production of "Little Mary Sunshine" opening April 10. The show is a dinner theatre running on Friday and Saturday through May 8 with a non-dinner performance on Sunday, April 11. Reservations are required for the dinner evenings.

"Little Mary Sunshine" ranks number 3 on the list of long-run off-Broadway productions and was one of the most refreshing satires ever produced. It won the Vernon Rice Award in 1959 for author-composer Rick Besoyan as the best offering off-Broadway that year, and had a successful run of 1,143 performances with Eileen Brennan and William Grammer in the principal roles.

The setting is the Rocky Mountains, the cast includes a company of forest rangers and the principal love duet is "Colorado Love Call." Most people over 40 will instantly recognize who and what is being skewered by this satire. Operettas of Friml, particularly "Rose-Marie," and in some instances Romberg are the obvious targets.

But because "Rose-Marie" was written back in 1924, adapted as an MGM movie musical with Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald in 1936, and remade with Howard Keel and Ann Blyth some 22 years ago, there may be some confusion among those under 30 of the show's aim. Hence, it has to stand on its own to be appealing to a composite audience of all age groups. What seemed clever 16 years ago may be incomprehensible to some members today.

This is the major problem I see with the current Benicia Old Town Theater Group's production of "Little Mary." The musical doesn't have sufficient plot to sustain interest and the music is hardly memorable, so playgoers are left with camp—or nostalgia, if you please—as the principal source of entertainment, and a little of that goes a long way.

Credit young director Ken Hein with keeping the show uncluttered of most affectations from the past and moving the proceedings along smartly. Bill Hay's Colorado Inn setting is lovely.

Jim Harper, an area veteran of resonant voice, returns as Captain Big Jim Warrington, leader of the forest rangers and handsome wooer of Miss Mary, played by Claudia Barr, a pretty coed from San Francisco with a fine voice and good stage presence.

Secondary romance centers around Cpl. Billy Jester (Bill Barron) and Naughty, Naughty Nancy (Marilyn Jackson) the Inn's maid, who provide most of the laughs with spirited performances.

Friday's opening performance was a bit ragged and uneven but a crowd of legal secretaries and guests whooped and applauded and let off steam after a hard week at the typewriters. It was as much a celebration of TGIF and liquid spirits as the performance.

The rangers, played by Lawrence Losch, Richard Silveria, Jamie Hamblett, John Taylor Annal and Thomas M. Ryan looked properly handsome and dashing in their maroon jackets and tan jodhpurs. (The hour-glass figure and obviously female complexion of one "ranger" created a suspicion later confirmed, that choreographer Liz Way was filling in for one of the above males.) The coquettish girls from the finishing school were played by Karen Lundgren, Joanne Arruda, Debbie Gilmore, Cathy Replegue and Gay Grooms, the latter possibly the best talent to appear in a Benicia show in the past four or five seasons.

Kevin McCall had fun with the dirty old man role of Oscar and Margaret Barber sang well as a Viennese opera star but her accent came and went, and better it should stay gone. Doc Scott ad libbed his way through the part of Chief Brown Bear, bringing down the house when he lost a feather in his breeches.

The show continues weekends through May 8. The over-40 crowd will love it.



Friday, April 16, 1976 Contra Costa Times

'Mary Sunshine'

Jim Harper plays Captain Jim and Claudia Barr is Little Mary in the Benicia Old Town Theater Group's production of "Little Mary Sunshine," being presented weekends through May 8 at IDES Hall, 140 West J, Benicia. The dinner/theater evening features cocktails, dinner and the musical, and tickets may be reserved by calling (707) 745-0130 or (707) 745-1355.

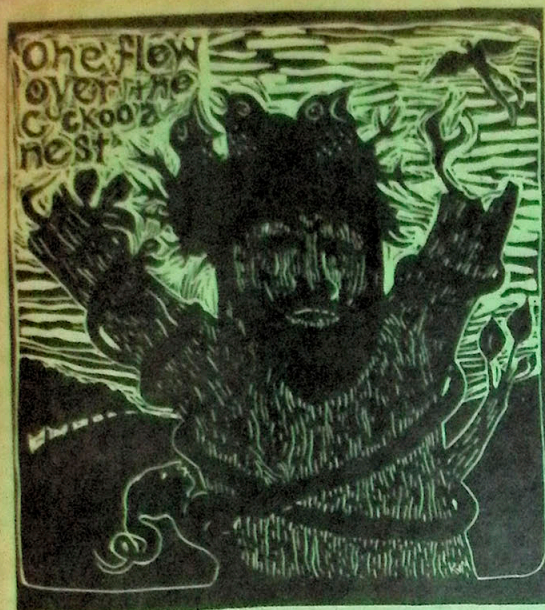


BENICIA STAGE PRODUCTION OPENS

Uncle Oscar (Kevin McCall) enjoys a walk with his niece, Cathy Newton, Cathy Redgrave, Bonnie Arvino, and Karen Lundgren, in the Benicia Old Town Theater Group's production of "Little Mary Sunshine," which opened April 16 at the Benicia Old Town Theater, 140 West J St. The dinner/theater presentation will continue

on Friday and Saturday evenings through May 8 with special non-dinner early evening performance on Apr. 25. Tickets are available at Winters and Winters (707) 831-1111 and World's News (746-3773) in Benicia and Walter's Music (645-5477) in Vallejo.

VALLEJO HERALD - 4/15/76



by dale wazzerman from the novel by ken kesey
presented by:
the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group

Oct. 22, 23, 29, 30
Nov. 5, 6, 12, 13, 19, 20
IDES Hall 140 West J St.
Benicia



CARD PLAYERS

Actors Spencer Dawson, Ed Balasco, Fred Davis and Red Levine play cards while Rick Bruno and Cliff Haggart watch in this scene from the gripping play "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," a Benicia Old Town Theatre Group production opening this weekend. Dinner show tickets are available at the usual agencies.



BENICIA Old Town Theatre Group actors portraying mental hospital patients in "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" are seated, from left, Spencer Dawson as Cheswick, Fred Davis as Harding, Red Levine as Scamlon, (standing, from left, Ed Balasco as R.P. McMurphy, Rick Bruno as Martini and Cliff Haggart as Billy Bibbit. The dinner-theater production will continue Friday and Saturday nights through Nov. 20 at IDES Hall, 140 W. J St., Benicia. — BOTG Photo

The Richter Scale

Judy Richter

City Editor

Benicia Group Faces Challenge In 'Cuckoo's Nest'

BENICIA— Benicia Old Town Theatre Group (BOTG) here took on a formidable task when it decided to do "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" as its fall 1976 production.

After all, the movie version won a raft of Academy Awards, led by Jack Nicholson's and Louise Fletcher's for acting in the principal roles of R.P. McMurphy and Nurse Ratched.

FURTHERMORE, many viewers probably saw the long-running, highly successful San Francisco stage production.

Thus this local presentation— thought to be the first by a community group— faces comparison with outstanding recent professional renditions.

Although I usually use differing criteria for professional and amateur

productions, during BOTG's opening night Friday I found myself applying professional standards.

ONE REASON is that during the past four years I have come to expect fine work from BOTG despite its amateur status.

The other reason is that I couldn't help comparing this production with the movie and the SF play.

For the most part, the comparison is favorable.

BOTG'S VERSION of "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" is well done, providing a generally satisfying theatrical experience.

The play concerns the conflict between the establishment as represented by Nurse Ratched and the free spirit as represented by McMurphy.

The action occurs in a mental hospital, where

McMurphy has managed to have himself confined in order to avoid a work farm sentence.

McMURPHY'S effect on the hospital routine and his fellow patients provides a variety of emotions and insights in a powerful, well-crafted story.

Directed by David Hester, this production features one of the strongest casts I've seen at BOTG.

Especially effective are the actors who portray the more important patients: Fred Davis as Dale Harding, Red Levine as Scamlon, Spencer Dawson as Cheswick and Ben Levine as Martini.

THE MOST outstanding acting comes from Fairfield resident Cliff Haggart, who portrays the stuttering, tragic patient, Billy Bibbit. It's a masterful job, worthy of any professional.

Mary Barry did a competent

job as Nurse Ratched, but I felt she didn't quite convey the basic character, whom I see as a woman whose empty life revolves about this hospital and whose ego-fed comes from wielding power over her hapless charges— all in the guise of doing good.

It's an extremely difficult role. One I'm not sure even Louise Fletcher carried off to best advantage.

FOR THAT reason, these comments about Barry's performance should not be seen as negative, for she's a capable actress whose work I have enjoyed in other productions.

I have similar feelings about Ed Balasco's performance as McMurphy. In this case, however, there's something more concrete that may be attributed to opening night jitters.

That something involves timing.

IF BELASCO had slowed his pace ever so slightly, he would have seemed more natural— like an exuberant con man rather than an "on-stage" carnival barker.

I also felt his movements had a bit too much bounce and not enough swagger.

The difference is fine— probably even not picking for community theater— but again I find my criteria influenced by professional productions of this play.

DANNY CLARK did a fine job as the treble Indian, Chief Bromden, whose fight to freedom represents hope in a nearly hopeless situation.

My one suggestion is that he show less reaction in the early scenes before it's learned that he's not really dead.

The production includes a number of well-conceived special effects, such as those for the chief's mental letters to his dead father and the incidental music, written and arranged by BOTG member Nancy Johnson.

THE OPENING night performance— sold out for more than a week— was well-received.

As the cast settles down from that always difficult task night, I believe the production will take on subtle theatrical qualities that will leave its viewers shaking from its impact.

I highly recommend it.

SINCE IT'S dinner theater, subsidiary steak catered by Hedwood Inn, Vallejo, reservations are required.

They may be made by calling Munder Music, 643-8277, Vallejo, or Walt City Drugs, 745-1355, or Winters & Winters, 745-0130, Benicia.

Performances will continue Friday and Saturday nights through Nov. 20 at IDES Hall, 140 W. J St., Benicia.

ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST

FALL 1976

Benicia's Old Town Theater (Richard)

New Dates 10/23/76



RED LEVINE OF OLD TOWN THEATRE takes Benicia stage Friday, Saturday

BENICIA — It's "All In The Family" at Benicia Old Town Theatre Group this fall. The cast of "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" is unique for the six family groups in the production.

Bob and Mary Ann Winters, husband and wife, are producing as well as acting in the academy award winning show. They are the parents of Pacia Clark who plays one of the institutional patients. Her husband, Danny, is playing the mute Indian Chief Bromden.

Local theatre goers will recognize Spencer Dawson and his wife Penny who play Cheswick and party girl Sandra. Judy Brown, Penny's sister and a newcomer to the Benicia stage, is cast as a nurse.

Ben and Red Levine, father and son team, take roles as ward patients. The Levines are well known to audiences of The Clay Pipers of Dry Town.

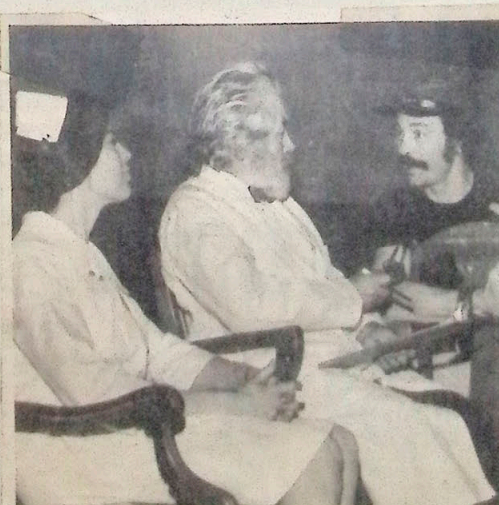
Ben Stodell portrays a chronic ward resident while his

wife Karyn ably assists the director.

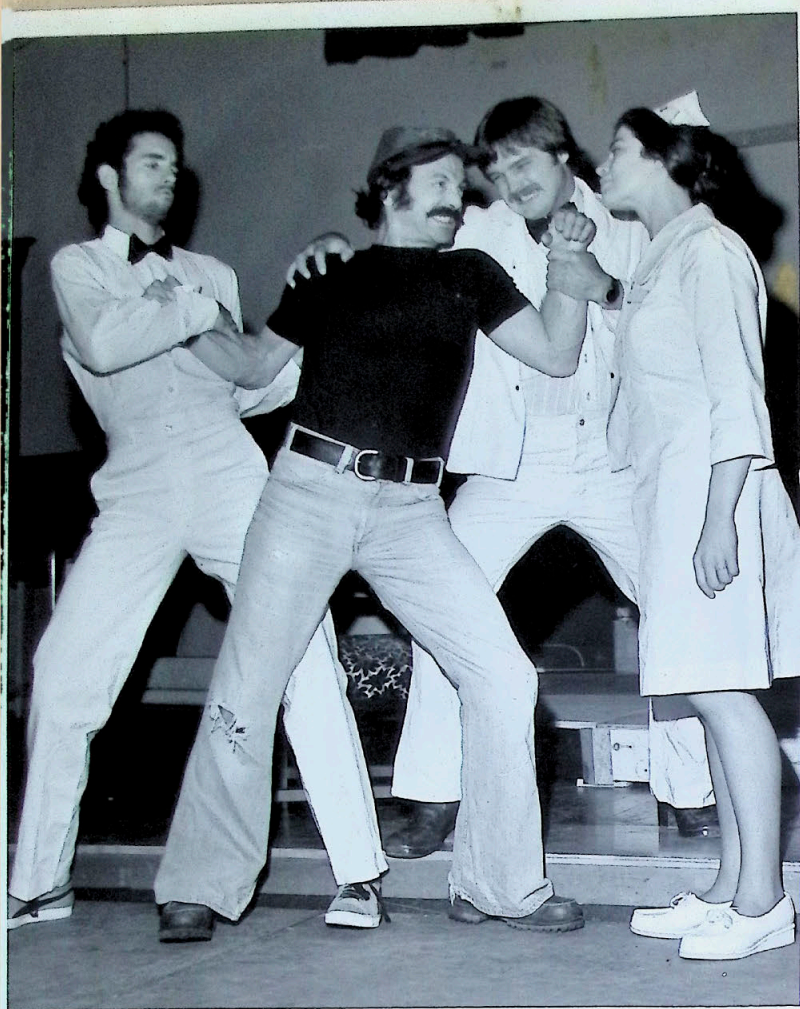
On the production side, Director Dave Rostor is aided by his wife Pamela who is designing costumes.

"One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" is playing Friday

and Saturday evenings through November 20th. Reservations for the dinner show at 140 West J Street, Benicia, may be made at Munder Music 643-5477, Wolf City Drug Store 745-1355, or Winters & Winters 745-0130.



Mary Barry and Bob Winters lead an ear to Ed Balasco of Walnut Creek in the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production, "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," opening Oct. 22 and running Friday and Saturday evenings through Nov. 20 at IDES Hall in Benicia. Reservations for the dinner show may be made by calling (707) 643-5477, 745-1355 or 745-0130.



'Cuckoo's Nest' Debuts

"One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" presented by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group, Fridays and Saturdays through Nov. 20. IDES Hall, 110 West J Street, 8:30 p.m., cocktail hour.

By Diana Slavov
There's something about attending a play that brings the characters a little closer to you than watching their performance on film.

Maybe it's the fact that the stage actors are three dimensional, present in the flesh, instead of captured light images, flashed onto a screen. Maybe it's the fact that because of this third dimension the audience senses and the actors know that one chance is all they're allowed. Or maybe it's the fact that a dinner theatre is more intimate than a movie theatre anyway, supping with friends and family in circles around tables to the glow and flicker of candlelight.

There is an intimacy I came away with, a feeling that brought me very close to those people under the lights. In a word, BOTTG's opening night performance of Ken Kesey's "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" was professional.

The play, for those unfamiliar with it, involves members of the acute ward in a state mental hospital. Patients are pitted against staff in the ensuing battle between the raucous new patient, R.P. McMurphy, and the nadir of compassion, Nurse Ratched, over rights and freedoms of those within the walls, hope is for what they grasp.

By intermission, when the lights came up, I wrote: a tight performance! I had watched each characterization unfold and flower during the first act, impressed by the depth and consistency all revealed. A mental ward deserves some study in respect and understatement, as those peopling it are real if a bit brain-battered. Any attempt to capitalize on the humorous antics of the patients for purely comic reasons at the sake of their real-ness, would have destroyed the credibility of drama in the other sequences. This, director Roster, avoided.

Yet the humor that is present plays a definite role; it acts as an escape valve for the

audience. The dramatic sequences between staff and patients, that one woman and a handful of assistants could so thoroughly brainwash and pin a crazy label on the "Average Joe" of the ward, are threatening to our very sanity.

Ed Belasco takes McMurphy in all his brashness and free-talking spirit and lays him out before us, grinning and strutting his way around the ward, daring and taunting. Mary Thomas Barry as Nurse Ratched allows nothing of the armor surrounding her to slip; she is the powerful iron-handed ruler, controlling outcomes of lives

in an omnipotent manner. Chief Bromden (Danny Clark) leads us in narration, which I could not hear at all clearly through the play. The last laugh goes to Billy Bibbit, a tender, moving performance of a man smothered by the women who control his fate: I see Harding, Szepien, Cheswick, Martini, and more.

Director David Roster, along with all at BOTTG, bring to those diners fortunate enough to be lured up the red-carpeted stairs to partake meal and muse an evening that is perhaps not all that much removed from the world beyond the footlights.



Randle P. McMurphy (Ed Belasco), lead player in "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," takes his medication as nurses Maggi Cohen Beasley and Judy Brown, and patients Mary Ann Winters and Pacia Clark look on. The dinner theatre production opens Fri., Oct. 22. For reservations call Winters & Winters, 745-1030.

Benicia Herald 10/20/76

STRICTLY SHOWBIZ

Benicia Opens Powerful Play

By JIMMIE JONES
Times-Herald Entertainment Editor

"One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" was a best selling novel before it became a powerful play which ran over five years in San Francisco. The movie version won a host of Oscar awards and a bundle of money for its producers.

Only recently, the play was released for amateur production and the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group snapped up the rights for the first little theatre version in the Bay Area.

Well, you've got to hand it to them. They have assembled a good cast and have mounted a top-notch show. In fact, it's the best amateur production I have seen in a long time.

But be warned. It's strong stuff intended for mature audiences. Don't take the kiddies. Dumps in mental hospitals aren't for the weak of stomach (which makes it a strange choice for dinner theatre).

The plot probably is familiar to most. Into a back ward of a mental hospital in the Pacific Northwest comes a free spirit named Randle P. McMurphy, who has sought refuge from the county workfarm by feigning insanity. The ward is the domain of Nurse Ratched, who rules her charges with an iron hand and takes an immediate dislike to the undisciplined McMurphy.

The grim duel for control of the ward ends with tragic results, but not without some injection of hope for the writhed inmates.

Ed Belasco, a UC Berkeley student with some professional training and credits, plays McMurphy and has elicited a fine characterization of a left-lacking con man with a heart of

gold. Mary Barry, last seen locally in "The Patriot Game," plays his evil nemesis, Nurse Ratched, and infuses the character with the proper mixture of deceitfulness and revenge.

Cliff Haggart as the stuttering, pitiful Billy Bibbit and Danny Clark as the autistic Chief Bromden lend strong support to the battle swirling around the two principals.

Other inmates are played by Fred Davis, Red Levine, Spencer Dawson, Rich Brown, Ben Levine, Ren Stodgett, Tim Donovan, Don Palmer, Pacia Clark and Mary Ann Winters. While some are much larger roles than others, it is vital that each remain true to his character throughout the play to maintain believability. This they do with wrenching effectiveness, oftentimes creating more characters communicating their torment with odd sounds and facial expressions only Rube to them all.

There are a number of other fine performances in the play and space won't allow listing them all. But one can't omit a part on the back to Barbara Cross for her nice job with the role of McMurphy's partygirl Candy Starr.

The production was directed by David Roster and he has kept the action moving smartly and given the actors good grasp of their roles. Some original music was composed and arranged by Barry Johnson and adds much to the production.

The Benicia folks have assembled a quality show. Not everyone here hears drama, of course, but I think players who have met the "one" stage and have a taste for "one" will enjoy it immensely.

Contra Costa Times

Friday, Oct. 29, 1976

On Stage in Benicia

By BILL WEIL

The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group is a rarity in the community theater field these days. It's probably the only dinner theater company in the East Bay with a regular season and regular patrons.

Last weekend I journeyed north to see their newest offering, "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," Dale Wasserman's stage adaptation of the novel, directed by David C. Roster. An evening with BOTTG begins early, with no-host cocktails served from 6:30 to 7:15, followed by an easily forgettable meal and more cocktails (if you wish), with the entertainment commencing around 8:30.

It's an interesting enough show, perhaps even more so because of the recent film version. People are familiar with the characters and receptive to the subject matter, so the choice itself is a good one for any company with the talent to fill the 21 rules, many of them demanding parts.

But Director Roster has made some grievous casting errors — notably Ed Belasco as R.P. McMurphy. Belasco just isn't trained enough as an actor to carry the role off, despite his energy. What is missing in his portrayal is real feelings. We never believe his anger because it's not there. What charm exists is seriously compromised by

his dress (more Hell's Angel than anything).

The writing is full of character, but Belasco stops short of full interpretation, letting his uneven delivery of lines serve instead. In short, the role lacks dignity.

Another oversight in the casting department involves an equally important element in the show's believability. Nurse Ratched, as played by Mary Thomas Barry, is less equipped than necessary for the task, being almost devoid of understanding and plastic in manner. Barry's attractive looks make her appear much too young for Nurse Ratched, while the problems of characterization may have gone unnoticed by the director.

"One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" has a superb supporting cast of chronic and acute patients, and Fred Davis (seen recently in "Company" in Concord) is the best. His pragmatic rendition of Harding is the most believable display of acting in the play — consistent, intelligent, and worthy of high marks.

Most of the patients are convincingly disturbed, while some, like Spencer Dawson as Cheswick, can't seem to let well enough

alone. Overdone twitching does not a nut make.

Some less affected characterizations include Cliff Haggart's Billy Bibbit (the stuttering mama's boy), Danny Clark's Chief Bromden, and Rick Bruno's Martini. The smaller parts are so-so, depending on whether or not the director's ideas for staging get in the way.

For instance, Chief Bromden's fantasy correspondence scenes are an intrusion into the flow of the play, and should have been down-played instead of so much time being spent lighting and scoring on them. Every now and then the action freezes, allowing one or more characters to perform against a tableau. These are gimmicks that could have been saved for something other than a realistic experience in a surreal environment.

The set (designed by John Meredith), is surprisingly accurate and efficiently lit by Betty Schneider. Nancy Johnson's original musical score is melodic, appropriate, and appealing. It would have been just as nice to dine to it, for that matter.

The price of an evening in Benicia's dinner theatre runs \$8.50 per person, and when the hall is full (as it was last weekend) there must be a good reason. The audience was eager and responsive to the performance, for there is much humor and compassion in the work.



Ron Stodgett (left), Don Palmer, Tim Donovan and Danny Clark are chronic ward patients in "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," a Benicia Old Town Theatre Group production.

SPRING 1977

[illegible]

"I Pina Bix Yu," a Benicia Old Town Theater Group dinner theater production, which opens at 146 West J Street, Benicia, tonight and continues Friday and Saturday evenings through April 30, features Norma Sharon, a Benicia resident, and Chris Bix, a Benicia resident, in a current apartment while Penny Massengill



Penny Massengill & Fred



Jill Anderson



Chris Schroeder Norma Sharon



Chris Schroeder Nori Hesse



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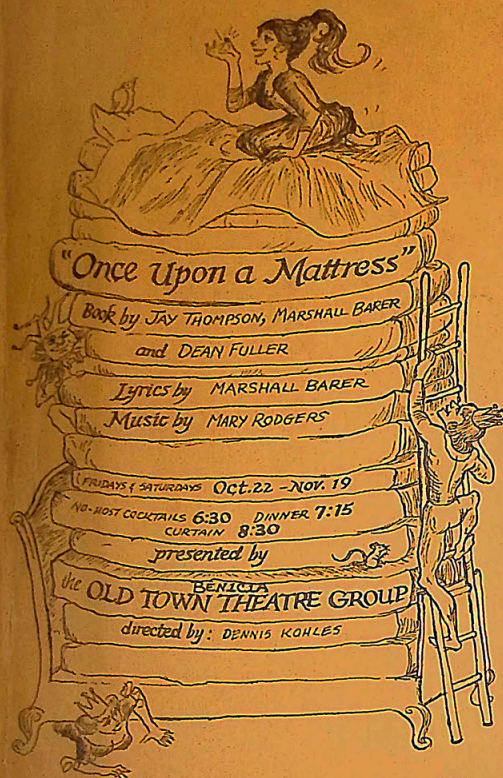
Norma Sharon Penny Massengill Chris Schroeder



Norma Sharon Chris Schroeder

FALL 1977

ONCE UPON A MATTRESS



'ONCE UPON A MATTRESS'

A Cheerful Musical Romp

By BETTY MINAHEN
Times-Herald Staff Writer

"Once Upon a Mattress," the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's current endeavor, is a cheerful musical romp through an old fairy tale. "The Princess and the Pea," and one of the best realized comedies the group has attempted.

The Broadway production launched comedienne Carol Burnett on her way to stardom, and while the BOTTG adaptation may not propel Linda Barron into the national limelight, it does establish her as one of the best comic actresses to walk the local boards.

She is enchanting as the graceless, indelible swatup princess, Winifred (called Fred), who swims the moat on hearing that "there was an opening for a princess" at the castle.

Penny Dawson is properly overbearing as the lascivious Queen Aggravain, who, while maintaining publicly that her son, the prince, MUST marry, does everything within her power to see that he does not.

From an overall good cast, prize performances are turned in by Todd Andrews as the lovable dolt, Prince Dauntless, and Martin "Red" Levine, who doesn't do much but stand around waiting to attend his queen, but he stands around in great laconic style.

Elle Murray is a charm-

ing, but woebegone Lady Larken, who, despite her growing problem, can not wed her love, the petulant Sir Harry. Dennis Smith, until the prince takes a princess.

George Irving is irresistible as the mute king, ever in hot pursuit of the giggling Norma Sharon, and the chirping Nightingale of Samarkand is a creation not to be entirely believed in.

The play is cheerful, briskly-paced and full of fun and nonsense as directed by Dennis Kohles. The chorus sang and danced with elan during the opening night performance, and their studied sincerity during the formal court dance made a funny dance hilarious.

Kristy Truelsen directs

the three piece instrumental ensemble which serves adequately to support the singers, but is simply too small to meet the demands

of an overture. The ensemble's placement on stage but in back of the set has the effect of making the members look as if the

queen's command, "Off with their heads," had been carried out.

Dinner theatre performances continue Fridays and Saturdays through Nov. 19 at the Old Town Theatre, 140 West J St.

The Daily Republic, Fairfield, Calif., Wed., Nov. 2

The Richter Scale

By JUDY RICHTER

DR City Editor

Expert Acting In Benicia's 'Once Upon A Mattress'

BENICIA— Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of the musical comedy, "Once Upon A Mattress," makes everything look easy.

Why? Because it's so expertly staged and acted that you forget it's a community theater production presented by amateurs. You also forget that the story, called an adult parody of "The Princess and the Pea," for no one may marry until Dauntless has a wife.

AFTER 12 princesses fail the test, Sir Harry sets off to find someone who will pass. Spurring him in his quest are his love for Larken and her pregnancy.

Harry returns with Winifred, who passes the queen's sensitivity test, not being able to sleep on a stack of mattresses under which the queen has placed a pea. Thus everyone lives happily ever after.

Taking comic honors for the night is Linda Barron as Winifred. Far from being fragile and refined, Winifred, better known as Fred, is a humpkin who wears green high-top tennis shoes.

NEVERTHELESS, she maintains a basic feminine appeal so that it's easy to understand why everyone except the queen likes her.

Penny Dawson also shows comic flair, playing the queen as an imperious yet slightly ridiculous woman who treats her adult son like a child, nags her mute husband and openly carries on with the bored young Studley.



CAST MEMBERS for Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of the musical comedy, "The Princess and the Pea," include (from left) Penny Dawson as Queen Aggravain, Dennis Smith as Sir Harry and

Other strong performers are Gordon Irving as King Sextimus, Todd Andrews as Prince Dauntless, Elle Murray as Larken, Dennis Smith as Sir Harry, Rick Bruno as the minstrel, Chuck Levine as the jester, Red Levine as Studley and Norma Sharon as Princess No. 12.

MUSICAL QUALITY in the show also is generally high, with Murray taking honors in the vocal department.

The set designed by Kohles and Dawson is serviceable, but I question having the four-member orchestra upstage with musical director Kristy Truelsen facing the audience. Although the rest of what was happening on stage was interesting enough that I wasn't distracted by this setup, it has the potential of diverting attention from the action.

My major criticism with this production is not the show itself but the dinner that precedes it. The par with college complete with a SINCERELY THEATER catered by Ben Vallejo, have a reservation in this one doesn't future.

The production Friday and Saturday through Nov. 19. For reservations call Benicia.

Enjoy Dinner Theater in Benicia

By MAGGIE CRUM

The pleasures of dinner theater are many, we discovered last weekend — the rumor that we'll soon have a dinner theater in Walnut Creek.

Last Saturday we ventured forth from Contra Costa to attend the opening of the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's fall musical "Once upon a Mattress."

Benicia, we learned, has had a thriving dinner theater since 1964. In the IDES Hall, just off the town's quiet main street, cocktails are served at 6:30, dinner about 7:15 and the curtain goes up at 8:30. We fared very well on a green salad, Veal Cordon Bleu, rice, ve-

getables and a refreshing orange sherbet. The diners are catered by a Vallejo restaurant. Cost for the dinner and the play — including tax and tip — is \$9. Pre-dinner and intermission drinks are extra (and very pleasant).

Plays attract theatergoers from all over the Bay Area and frequently are so popular that extra performances are arranged. Large groups seem to love the relaxed evenings.

Among those attending the current production are the Mt. Diablo Women's Club, Concord Naval Weapons Station, Contra Costa County Offices, Richmond Kiwanis Club and Crown Zellerbach employees.

The IDES Hall (owned by a Portuguese fraternal order) seats 250 comfortably. Tables are cleverly angled so that we could see and hear very well — fortunate because "Once upon a Mattress" proved to be a delight.

The director and also the choreographer is Dennis Kohles, who directed the enormously successful "Born Yesterday" last spring at the Parkside Playhouse in Concord. In the program notes, Kohles writes, "Once long ago in a faraway land lived a haughty queen and a mute king and a handsome prince named Dauntless. None of the knights or ladies in the kingdom could marry until Dauntless found a bride — a circumstance which caused many unfortunate situations. But the Queen was extremely choosy on the question of a bride for her son — and thereby hangs the tale.

"In our adult parody of 'The Princess and the Pea' we go to a land of fantasy — far from inflation and unemployment. Join this enchanted kingdom with us. Spend a carefree evening with the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group."

Kohles has assembled a spirited cast in a frolic of a musical that drew enthusiastic whistles and cheers as well as applause from

the audience. Pat Kohles and Gen Coonadt are responsible for the floating and colorful medieval costumes. And versatile Dennis Kohles also shows his masterly touch in the never-neverland palace sets. The musical director is Kristy Truelsen.

Distinctive performances are given by Rick Bruno as the minstrel and Gordon Irving as the mute but infinitely expressive King Sextimus (he endeared himself to Clive Arts Theater patrons as the unforgettable Vice President Alexander Throtlebottom in "Of Thee I Sing"). Penny Dawson is the incredibly bossy Queen Aggravain, whose son, nearly played by Todd Andrews, is in direct contrast to his name, Dauntless. Linda Barron plays Winifred ("Call me Fred"), whose blood is so refined that she finds slumber an impossibility when a pea is placed under the 20 mattresses on which she reposes.

Adding their talents to the zany romp are Marin Levine as Studley, Elle Murray as Larken (whose predicament is such that she is in desperate and immediate need of a husband) and Dennis Smith as Sir Harry. Contra Costans in the cast include Marilyn Simmonds, student at DVC who plays the Nightingale of Samarkand; Maggi Cohen Beasley, Concord; Donald Palmer, Concord; Norma Sharon, who works in Concord, and Betty Mar-

tin, secretary at Clayton Valley High School. The play continues Friday and Saturday nights through Nov. 19. For ticket information call (707) 745-9139.



Penny Dawson portrays the giddy Queen Aggravain in the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's "Once upon a Mattress."

Blindfolded... in Benicia

An experiment produces total enjoyment

By Molly Sturdevant

I arrived in Benicia blindfolded. Perhaps not the best day of the week for my experiment, it was Sunday, October 16. Stripping the kerchief away, I found myself in a strange town, with no knowledge of where I was, and was told to be at the old Capital Building at 2:30 or so the next day. It wasn't long before a sign blared "Benicia" at me, but it might as well have been Greek.

My story was my all. I am a student at World College West in San Jose, in the World Study Program, and as an exercise connected with my coming six-month study in Mexico, had just been dropped off in a strange town. I knew no one, had \$1.10, and was to "survive" till the next afternoon, when I'd be driven back to Marin County.

As I walked toward the water in the sunny morning breeze, I spoke with everyone I met: a father fishing for bass with his two sons, three elementary school kids searching for crawly creatures under

the algae-covered rocks, an elderly man attempting to kill the crabgrass which was invading the pavement near his home, the women at the corner antique store. As I continued exploring this town entirely new to me, I felt little insecurity about where I might end up, but allowed by combined mellow feelings and sense of risk to guide me. The romance had begun!

It was perhaps an hour and a half after my arrival that I entered the IDES/Little Theater building on that quiet day. The structure is a beautiful old one, which is what prompted my entering it. There on the landing, a man worked from a ladder, adjusting posters on the wall. I asked him what the building was, and following a brief explanation, he said, "If you stick around much longer, we'll put you to work!" Ahal an invitation to tell my adventure to yet another person! Several others were around to her me say, "Well hey! Maybe we can make a deal!" And I proceeded to tell how I'd

arrived there.

Mary Ann Winters was one of those bystanders who quickly became involved. She pocketed my suggestion, and offered me a bed for the night in exchange for a bit of work toward the production. So I began my stay in Benicia by vacuuming the stage of the theater. The crew continued preparations, the cast trickled in for the coming rehearsal, and I mingled with the curious, in-between making sandwiches, hanging curtains, and serving potluck. What an energetic group to meet in my potentially unstable position! I spent most of the day in the theater in various roles, and watched the first dress rehearsal of "Once Upon a Mattress" that evening.

Bob and Mary Ann Winters, not to mention many other folks involved in the play, are fine people. They took me into their home on the hill with welcome and readiness, fed me, gave me a tour of the motley history of intriguing Benicia, and cross examined me (being the lawyers they are) for my life's tale. It turned out

they had almost, at one point in their lives, moved to my native Alaska, and were familiar with the country I'll soon find myself a foreigner in. There were discussions of our respective trips to Europe, and visits with their daughter, Patsy, and Danny and Josh I romped with their two Labrador retrievers. The production Friday and Saturday through Nov. 19. For reservations call Benicia.

Back in San Anselmo, I'm wondering why my experience in Mexico paralleled the fun, personal involvement, and simplicity of working with locals I knew for barely 24 hours in Benicia. It seems almost too easy, but I guess I'll have to wait to find out.

11/4/77



LINDA BARRON portrays Princess Winifred, with assistance from Gordon Irving as King Sextimus and Chuck Levine, Jester, in the knee-slapping musical-comedy, "Once Upon A Mattress," produced by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group. This dinner show opens October 22, and runs Friday and Saturday evenings through November 19. Dinner reservations are required, and may be obtained by calling Winters & Winters, 745-0130. Tickets may also be purchased at Wolff's Drug Store. Benician 10/19/77



The musical comedy is based on the fairy tale "The Princess and the Pea." Lois Gibson, above right, and Queen Penny Masengill Dawson doubt that a princess could sleep with "a can of peas" under her canopy. The dinner-theatre production, continues weekends through Nov. 19 with catering by Redwood Inn.



Secretary Pat Wyatt approves as Jester Chuck Levine searches for the true princess while Linda Barron as Princess Winifred hopes that "the shoe fits." The gala opening night begins with cocktails at 6:30, followed by 7:15 dinner and an 8:30 curtain. Mrs. Wyatt, 745-0130, has ticket information.--Times-Herald Photos.

"Once Upon a Mattress"

A delightful occasion

By Sherry Jones

Can an adult, musical, humorous fairytale that hints at incestuous love, adultery, and pre-marital sex, be done with humor, professionalism and in good taste? In this case of the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group players, the answer is definitely in the affirmative.

The 8:30 p.m. curtain for Friday night's opening night of "Once Upon a Mattress" was preceded by no host cocktails and a delicious catered dinner. The gala evening was hosted by the legal secretaries of Solano County and the attendance was large.

"Once Upon a Mattress" is not predominantly a plot play; it does have a moral, but its strength is in its characterization. Only an experienced and seasoned director could have cast this play with the capacity to make the characters believable, and hold an audience's attention for an entire play of exhausting humor. Director Dennis Kohles is obviously a student of human behavior, because his typecasting was on the money.

Perhaps all the actors in "Mattress" are not going to be inundated with offers to do professional singing, but the audience was given an enticing supposition of the quality of Ellie Murray's operatic voice in her portrayal of Larkin. Her combined acting and singing talents gave the play a professional flavor, that might not have been felt as strongly without her skill. Humor is a mixture of many

avenues of communication, one of them is facial expression and another eye contact. Linda Barron receives the primo nod in her role of Winifred, with Rick Bruno, the Minstrel, a close second in engulging audience contact. If one were to run the spectrum on eye contact, Penny Dawson, (whose acting and facial expressions were thorough), seemed to have her eye contact somewhere above the audience level... perhaps this was her method of enhancing her successful portrayal of the haughtiness of her role.

Every play seems to produce "unexpected actors". The lead parts, of course, are anticipated to attract the patrons attention, but the "unexpected" is an intangible source of energy and talent that often does not activate until the play is done before live breathing bodies. Red Levine who played the part of Studley found himself with the theatergoers in the palm of his hand; so much so that it nearly broke him up during a fairly important scene. Norma Sharon in her role as Princess No. 12 also culminated great rapport with her spectators, with a giggle that would shame the Tickle commercials.

The orchestra seemed to be pulled and swayed by the accompanying stage players, because the music was almost felt more than heard by the audience...this is a talent that complements rather than competes for the audiences attention. Christy Truelsen, Musical Director is to be congratulated.

The choice of pastel colors for the lights, sets and costumes were enhancing to the play...only Queen

Aggravain wore a blaring color, which rightfully accentuated her personality of a domineering wife and mother. Our compliments to Pat Kohles, Gen Coonradt and Bill Granger on their costume and light designs.

Penny Dawson, while doing a strenuous bit of acting, was nearly sabotaged by her own endeavor. As set designer, along with director, Dennis Kohles, she must have been amazed to have had the bird cage handle come off in her hands. It must be stated however, that her recovery was most commendable...as she humorously extended her derrier into the air and physically pulled what must have been a heavy awkward cage on to the stage by its frame.

It is supposed by all who watched opening night of "Mattress" that in future productions more than one person will be put on the side screen to prevent another near disaster, and that Sir Guile the Juggler, will keep his juggling equipment out of view of the audience, until it is time for the juggling act.

However, if these mistakes and flaws could be measured against the quality of the entertainment, the flaws would be the size of the pea placed under the Princess's mattress, by Queen Aggravain.

Opening night is a critic's hey day, because the initial performance illuminates weaknesses and flaws in the choice of play, casting, props, the amount of preparation, etc. Often on opening night, it is difficult for a critic to be kind. Occasionally, a critic is delighted...Friday night was one of those occasions.

BOTTG's Dennis Kohles

Director of the court

By Leslye Asera

I found myself in a room full of royalty - kings, queens, princesses, ladies and gentlemen of the court. The colors made me dizzy - bright blue capes, pink, orange and crimson gowns, elaborate hats of brilliant colors. And in the center of the flurry was Dennis Kohles, directing this whirlwind of color and merry madness into a viable art form - the present production by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group of "Once Upon A Mattress."

Dennis is a psychologist, at least when he directs. He has found that directing has little to do with acting, and all to do with working with and knowing people. "If I find that I'm not getting what I want from someone on stage, I try to relate to that person in a different way," Dennis explains.

During our interview, it became apparent that

Dennis had his hand in creating more than one aspect of the show. When I arrived he was helping to put the finishing make-up touches on the face of the mischievous queen.

"What about my make-up?" asks one of the male players as he leaves the dressing table.

"No, too pale," says Dennis. "I brought some new make-up for men's faces. It's over on the other table. Try the one with orange tones."

It turns out that Dennis is not only responsible for the direction of this show, but also for the choreography, make-up, and set design. There are not many aspects of show production that he is not familiar with. In addition he is an actor, dancer, singer, costume designer and constructor of sets.

This is the third time that Dennis has been involved in a production of



Director Dennis Kohles clowning with leading lady Linda Barron.

this particular show. The first time he acted in the show himself, the second time he directed it for a youth group. For an adult dinner theatre audience, Dennis feels he can present the show in a little different way. "It can be bawdier, more risqué and tainly more fun."

Although Dennis doesn't raise his voice, he commands the respect of his cast and crew. They are ready to try his new ideas, change this a little here, that a little there, to make the finished product the wonderful mixture of comedy, craziness and color that it is.

THE NIGHT OF THE IGUANA
SPRING — 1978

"Night of The Iguana"

Superb Acting, Special Effects, Set Design

By GERRY CARROLL
Reporter Staff Writer

Superb acting, effective set design and some spectacular special effects make "Night of the Iguana" a worthwhile evening of entertainment as presented by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group.

The show opened March 31 and is running every Friday and Saturday night through April 29. No-host cocktails are served beginning 6:30 p.m. with dinner at 7:15 and curtain time for the play set at 8:30. The theatre is located at 140 West "J" St. in Benicia.

At right around two hours in length, the play is not too long and does not end up boring the audience. The action is continuous, and blocking set by director Bill Granger is well-rehearsed and realistic in concept.

Emotional Performance

"Night of the Iguana" plays to a background of a run-down Mexican hotel, off the usual tourist areas. The principle character is the Rev. T. Lawrence Shannon, played with biting emotionalism by Edd Linskey.

Shannon is an ordained priest who has fallen by the wayside; his personal view of God is drastically different than views of other clergymen. Consequently, as a result of his "defrocking" which was a result of insidious behavior with young women, he turned to Mexico to direct tours and live basically a miserable existence.

Shannon is pushed around with regularity by the hotel's manager, Maxine Faulk, played by Rhea Leonard. Her performance was very convincing and set the stage for Shannon's contrasting craziness.

Crazy Tourists

German tourists play an outside role in the show, supporting the principle characters. Ron Duran, Gloria Kipsey, Elizabeth Gill and Mark Reuter form a most unusual and offbeat family that ridicules Shannon and his antics, among other things.

Michael Christopher and George Spelvin play respective supporting roles as Pedro, a Mexican hired hand, and Hank, a bus driver. Although small parts, they are played with a realism

that sets the proper atmosphere for the show.

Eddie Lewis steals the show as Hannah Jelkes, the aging spinster who has romantic outlines for Shannon. She has to attend to her grandfather, Nonno — played by Bob Titus — and scratch out a meager living selling water colors and her grandfather's poems.

Some Struggling

Michael McIntyre plays Jake Latta, one who doesn't put up with Shannon and his problems. The only "violent" scene in the show pits Jake and Shannon as they argue about Shannon's increasing insanity and how it's hurting the tour business.

Meanwhile, Christina Belvis is Charlotte Goodall, a teenager who gives in to Shannon's animalistic interjections, and Lois Patricia Gibson is realistically stiff-and-proper as Miss Judith Follows, the head of a Baptist church group touring Mexico and one who doesn't take any of Shannon's lies



STRONG PERFORMANCES — The Rev. T. Lawrence Shannon (left) (played by Edd Linskey) and Hannah Jelkes (played by Eddie Lewis) are two principle characters in "Night of the Iguana," a Tennessee Williams' play performed by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group every Friday and Saturday night through April 29. Curtain time for the show is 8:30 p.m., with dinner served at 7:15 and no-host cocktails at 6:30.

and devious activity.

The show is worth seeing. Despite a few very technical flaws, the performance is exceptional and is very ab-

sorbing. It is a serious drama, yet funny in many respects. Tennessee Williams' true dramatic ability comes to light with this group.

Promising BOTTG Production Of Tennessee Williams Drama

By BETTY MINAHEN

Few would fault the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group for timidity. Although they are an amateur company with actors drawn primarily from the Benicia-Vallejo-Martinez area, they are ready and willing to tackle just about anything written for the dramatic stage, from musicals to tragedies, from Mollere to Ken Kesey. I doubt that any BOTTG production staff has chosen to produce a work simply because it looked easy.

And certainly Tennessee Williams plays are not easy. He ranks among the heavyweights in the world of modern drama. Often his verbal and visual symbolism is obscure, and on occasions, like ACT's premiere, a couple of seasons ago of "This Is...An Entertainment," he is theatrical to a fare-thee-well. But his gifts for creating character and mood and the typical of his dialogue are almost unparalleled and any actor would love to be cast in a Williams play.

His 1961 award-winning drama, "The Night of the Iguana," is BOTTG's new dinner-theatre production (playing Fridays and Saturdays through April 29 at IDES Hall, Benicia). Typically, it is peopled with fascinating characters at critical points in their lives — a defrocked priest, a lusty widow, and a seemingly vulnerable New England spinster, all deflected people entrapped by life like the iguana of the title, which is captured and tormented before it is consumed.

The BOTTG production, directed by Bill Granger, needs a good deal of tightening up (even the fascinating second act revelation scene between Hannah, the spinster, and Shannon, the priest, drags), and a pair of major characterizations need to be fleshed out.

Still, with some sage directorial adjustments, the production should mature into one the group can be proud of.

A notably good performance, calm and measured, is turned in by Eddie Lewis as Hannah, the spinster forced to hustle her art to support herself and her ancient and dependent poet-grandfather (well drawn by Bob Titus).

A lack of dimension weakens the performances of both Edd Linskey as



Rhea Leonard, left, plays Maxine, a tough resort owner in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, and Eddie Lewis is Hannah, a gentle New England spinster, in the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of "The Night of the Iguana." Reservations for the dinner-theatre production, which continues Fridays and Saturdays through April 29 at IDES Hall, may be made by contacting Munter Music in Vallejo or Winters and Winters in Benicia.

Shannon and Rhea Leonard as the recently-widowed hotel owner. Shannon's impending nervous breakdown is at the forefront of Lipsky's every line as the former priest, tormented by the conflict between the demands of his flesh and tenets of his church.

A veteran actress, Ms. Leonard lends to play the lusty Maxine in a single key as well, indicating to me that both players need more direction in their characterizations.

The atmosphere of a rustic mountainside resort-hotel on the edge of an encroaching Mexican jungle is nicely evoked by Penny Dawson's set and enhanced by good lighting (Bob Winters, Carla Jansen and Noel Rich) as sound effects (Dann Clark) including a well contrived electrical storm.

Effective in feature roles were Lois Gibson as the take-charge school teacher, Christina Belvis as the love-struck Benicia George Spelvin as Hank and Michael McIntyre as Jake.

Page 14—The Daily Republic, Fairfield, Calif., Wed., Apr. 5, 1978

The Richter Scale

By JUDY RICHTER

DR City Editor

Benicia Theater Group Stages 'Night Of Iguana'

BENICIA — After a series of successful dinner-theatre productions during the past years, Benicia Old Town Theatre Group has come up with a new one.

The play is Tennessee Williams' "The Night of the Iguana," which I saw Saturday night. It opened Friday night.

DIRECTED BY Bill Granger, the show is flat. It operates at one emotional level throughout, thereby missing the dramatic flair.

The lead, Edd Linskey as the Rev. T. Lawrence Shannon, seems unable to probe the troubled depths of his character, instead playing him at the same frenetic level throughout the show. Such a characterization brings to mind a design principle that applies also to the performing arts — all emphasis is no emphasis.

The actors seem able enough, but some are miscast. Several women, for example, carry their parts quite well but don't seem physically right for them.

ON THE OTHER HAND, I must say I've seen far worse productions in the amateur realm. Perhaps my judgment is a bit harsh here because I've been spoiled by some outstanding BOTTG shows, most recently "Once Upon a Mattress" last fall.

"The Night of the Iguana" will continue at IDES Hall, 140 W. J St., on Friday and Saturday nights through April 29. Tickets are available from Winters & Winters in Benicia, 745-0128.

9-Benicia Herald, Wednesday, April 5, 1978

BOTTG's "Night of the Iguana"

A winning ticket will help the show

By Sherry Jones

It has finally happened! In the past nine months that I have been doing reviews of local plays, I have been able to give only rave reviews. However, "Night of the Iguana" has ended my optimistic cherry line of chatter. We must, however, keep in mind that this critic had a wisdom tooth pulled the morning of the play and was feeling a bit "testy" around the jawline.

The setting for my first pan was the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's Saturday night performance of Tennessee Williams' play, "Night of the Iguana," held in the IDES Hall at First and J Streets.

I doff my hat, however, to Edd Linskey and Edith Lewis who played the leads in the production. They not only led the players — they supported

them and kept the play from sinking with the sun into the Puerto Vallarta scenery.

Edd played the part of the Reverend T. Lawrence Shannon, a renegade, defrocked minister who stirred the emotions deeply. One was compelled to mother him, spank him and give him a drink just to calm the poor man down. There was a lady who was able to reach him: Hannah Jelkes, played by Edith. Her carriage, courage and delivery were superb — it was exactly what the Reverend needed and what the play needed as well.

The part of Hannah's grandfather, Nonno portrayed by Bob Titus was somehow disappointing to me. Perhaps he was trying too hard, but his characterization was not consistent. My other gripe

was the German family. The daughter, Tillie, played by Elizabeth Gill was "cutey" with her ball throwing and what ever, but the whole family left me irritated. But, I must give the director, Bill Granger credit in the family portrayal. I, too, believe Williams intended the three members to function as an entity and that end was achieved.

There were a lot of new faces in the play, and some for the first time out. When looking over the program following Scene 1, I noticed some familiar names in the behind the scenes action. Names such as Danny Clark, Penny Dawson and Linda Barron — it made me wish for a fleeting moment that those people could trade places with the players and rescue the play.

After the grating and rather draggy first scene,

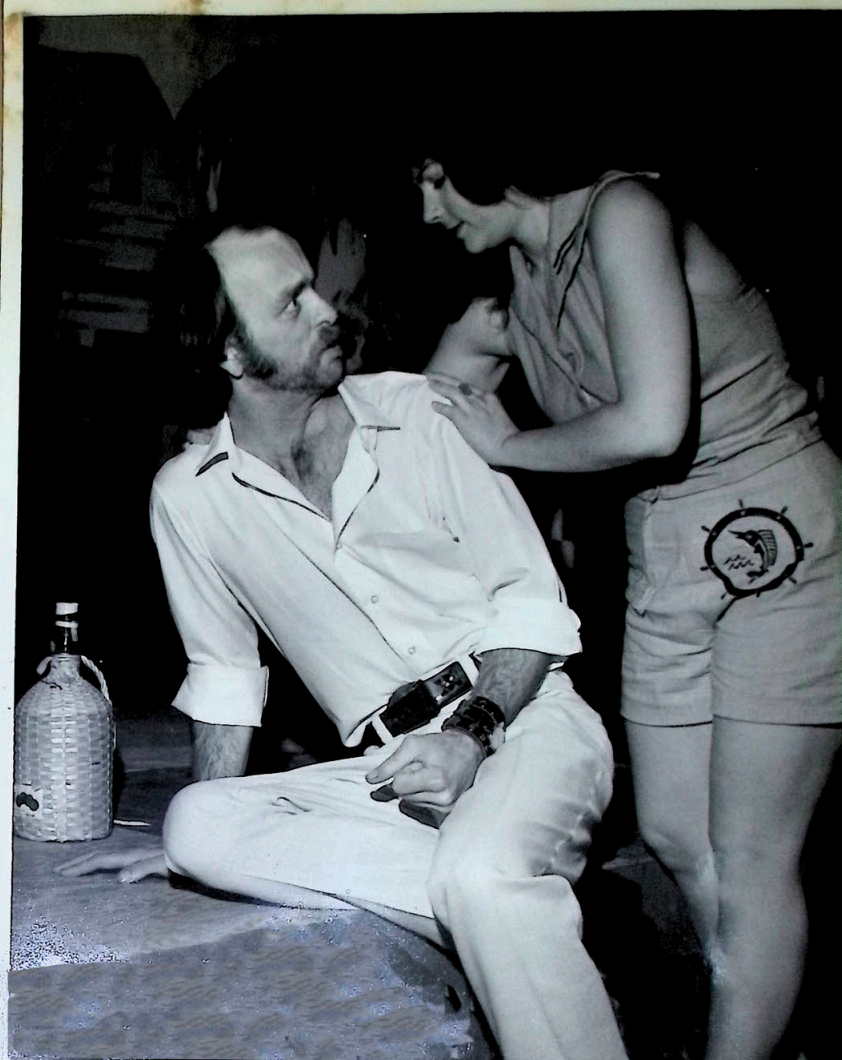
things began to pick up. Edd and Edith's parts dominated the second act and it was a blessing. They did a really remarkable job. Their parts were very believable, and that is saying something for a Tennessee Williams play. His plays use symbols, parallels and concentrate on characterization.

Bill Granger and his tribe bit off a pretty large bit when they chose "Night of the Iguana." I do hope lots of people support the BOTTG and go to see the play that runs through April 29th. It's not their best...but it is an enjoyable evening. I can't comment on the food, because I could not eat!

Although the production left thinking, "Is that all there is?" all will be forgiven if my ticket should be drawn for the trip to Puerto Vallarta that was donated by Benicia Travel.



George Spelvin Bob Titus Tony Rivera
 Mike McIntyre Lois Gibson Chris Bevis Michael Christopher
 Edith Lewis Edd Linskey Rhea Leonard
 Mark Rauter Elizabeth Gill Gloria Kipsey Ron Duran



Edd Linskey Christina Bevis



Christina Bevis Lois Gibson



Edd Linskey Edith Lewis

LITTLE MURDERS

FALL 1978

THE BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE
PRESENTS ITS 1978 FALL PRODUCE.

"LITTLE MURDERS"

BY JULES FEIFFER



DIRECTED BY: DAVID C. ROSTER

Jules Feiffer's satirical knife spares none

By BILL BOYER

Jules Feiffer's "Little Murders," a far production currently being staged by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group, plunges a satirical knife into the violent core of the Big Apple, shoots holes in middle-class values, sprinkles some arsenic into marriage and religion, and, for good measure, pistol-whips a number of prejudices.

That description may seem harsh, but there's a very little generalization in Feiffer's 1967 black comedy. Directed by David C. Roster, the play is in its final weekend at the I.D.E.S. Hall in Benicia.

In choosing not to play it safe with another time-tested, venerable work, the Old Towners have incurred a few walk-outs during "Murders," presumably, due to the midly graphic language or the fact that a hippie priest delivers a sermon in his underwear. But for the most part the play has been embraced by theater-goers who understand the wallop packed in Feiffer's bare-knuckled statements.

The night I was present there was a cross-section of hearty laughter—strikes, ironic chuckles and stoic disapproval from the audience. In a sense the latter is a measure of the play's success for Feiffer had hoped to reach those insulated from random violence, shattered dreams and the paranoia of constantly being under siege in your own home. The Theatre Group is to be commended for tackling such strong material.

Which is not to say there aren't flaws in the play itself or in the direction or in the performances. The play is set in the post-Vietnam period and much of the humor, especially that dealing with homosexuals, seems outdated. Some of the gags are too often repeated, especially the flushing of the toilet. Overall the performances are strong, but some of the characterizations were one-dimensional. There's interest in the characters, but a lack of sympathy. The play originally failed on Broadway, but was later turned into a hit under the intelligent direction of actor Alan Arkin.

For theater-goers, the stage is set early at the I.D.E.S. Hall. We were greeted by National Guardsmen rather than ushers. The walls were festooned with police range targets and newspaper stories that shouted "murder" in their headlines, tablecloths were appropriately colored red and flower stems rested in beer cans riddled by bullets.

Dinner (\$9.50) was served an hour before curtain time. After testing mine for arsenic, I plunged into a sizable portion of roast beef, complete with salad, vegetable, baked potato, melon and dessert. Wine, beer and cocktails were also available. The lights went down at 8:15 p.m., followed by sides of still more grisly newspaper headlines and accompanied by ragtime music.

THE BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE GROUP
PRESENTS ITS 1978 FALL PRODUCE

"LITTLE MURDERS"

JULES FEIFFER



DIRECTED BY: DAVID C. ROSTER

With the exception of a judge's monologue, the play is staged on a single set in a middle-class big city flat that shelters a hard-working, hard-drinking, loser father: an over-optimistic mother, a shiftless, rug-sprawling, toilet-going son, and a daughter who speaks like a truck driver and finds refuge on daddy's knee. Brought into the family is the boyfriend, a turn-the-other-cheek pacifist who eventually marries the daughter.

Plot? There isn't much. Like Feiffer's deep-thinking cartoon characters, the play is more a series of monologues or a variety of subjects and themes interlaced between mini-events that are funny, tragic, repugnant, pathetic and real. The play is kept moving by running gags (toilet flushing, a heavy breathing low phone caller) and by injections of new characters.

There is a marriage, a senseless murder and the play winds up with the family taking turns firing shots at pedestrians from the window of the flat. Not exactly your classic plot.

There are a number of juicy roles, but the son-in-law character of Alfred is the key one. That role is essayed by Martin "Red" Levine, well-known in this area for his work in

local theatre groups over the last 15 years. At first Alfred is a little too klutzy and overplays it (his eyes wander a bit too much as he listens to what people say about him). But as the play wears on and Alfred's dialogue increases, Levine tightens the reins, becomes convincing and adds dimension to the role. I never saw the transition from pacifist to killer, but that is more a problem in the play than in the interpretation.

As the father, Ben Levine turns in a great performance. Son of an Archie Barker with Oscar Homolka eyes, Levine demonstrates his veteran actor's status with expert gestures, an expressive but restrained face and a projecting bed-of-thorns voice (you can almost see the pebbles fall out).

Marilyn Schenberg was outstanding as the daughter. Her physical size and demeanor were right for the role, and she showed exceptional emotion range, especially in an early retrospective with her father. She also displayed slight touch, with comedy and still a third dimension as a bitchy, selfish, harassing female.

I also particularly liked Mary Ann Winters, skillfully underplayed aphonous mother. She blended well with the furniture most of the time, but would burst forth from the woodwork with a bang thanks to some nice timing.

Each supporting role achieved impact both by Feiffer's pen and the energy etched into it by each performer. The son's help keeps things interesting as Tim Donovan supplied the necessary comic relief as the toilet flushing son; Tadg Galleran had his moments as the hippie priest; director David Roster's cameo as a Jewish judge was a sledgehammer performance that added vitality. Danny Clark as the paranoid detective should have his own TV series, and Bill Barron as the nervous, Barney Fife second detective also earned his badge.

Those looking for a plot with a beginning, middle and end will be disappointed. Those seeking for a moral will be disappointed. Those looking for a reflection of some of the absurdities of the times will not be.

e Richter scale

By Judy Richter
Daily Republic Entertainment Editor

Benicia's 'Little Murders'

BENICIA — As a cartoon character once said, "We have met the enemy and they are us."

That statement seems to sum up the theme of Jules Feiffer's black comedy, "Little Murders," being staged by Benicia Old Town Theatre Group as dinner-theater.

Set in a New York City apartment, the play focuses on the Newquist family: father Carol (Ben Levine); mother Marjorie (Mary Ann Winters); son Kenny (Tim Donovan), about 22 years old; daughter Patsy (Marilynn Schenberg), in her late 20s; and Patsy's fiancé, Alfred Chamberlain (Red Levine).

Even though the Newquists have already lost a son, shot by an unknown assailant on 97th Street, and Patsy is shot during the play, they seem blasé toward urban ills. During recurrent power failures, for example, they light candles and flick on cigarette lighters without losing a beat in their conversation.

They also note that Steve, the dead brother, bombed Vietnam and Cambodia, but he had "not an enemy in the world."

Alfred is so spaced out that he never fights back during the weekly beatings he receives on city streets. His lack of any kind of feeling, his nihilism, is stalwart Patsy's greatest frustration. "Kissing you is like kissing white bread," she says to him.

After Patsy's death we

meet two shell-shocked detectives (Danny Clark, Bill Barron), and the ends with the family pot shots at people their front window, thing pliggishly into the

Although the play, some serious ills in society — man's inhumanity and all that sharp satire is dulled. Hence I found wishing some chaos would shut up and moan.

This reaction strongest during the ding scene, where minister (Tadg Galleran) launched into a tirade down to his shorts and provoked fight.

Since the actors themselves at least — Marilyn Schenberg, outstanding as Patsy, blame Feiffer for the problems, but David Roster could have helped with some and underplaying.

In fact, Roster provoked my is-going-to-end reaction the scene in which he ranting judge. These question the wisdo director's casting his a show.

Although I didn't play, others in the night audience said: And undoubtedly tuction will be smoother as the b worked out.

The show will Friday and Saturday through Nov. 25 at Hall, 125 W. J St. tions, \$9.50 for din the show, may be m Winters & Winters, I

Black Mood Is Beautiful

By BETTY MINAHEN

BENICIA — Black is the mood, but many and hearty are the laughs in the Benicia Old Town Theatre production of "Little Murders," playing weekends through November in IDES Hall here.

Director David C. Roster has elicited generally fine performances from his actors and offers a rich, exciting interpretation of Jules Feiffer's satiric look at post-Vietnam America in the microcosm of an average, middle class apartment - dwelling Manhattan family.

This reviewer attended the dress rehearsal of the play and so missed the "building under seige" atmosphere promised in regular performances. But the play carries itself and although some of the more settled members of the preview audience were obviously offended by the graphic use of vocabulary and some other interesting aspects of the production, these were well-suited to the destruction of traditional institutions which is the spine on which the play is constructed.

Strong performances were turned in by Marilyn Schenberg as the formidable Patsy, who has spent her life overcoming adversity, and by Martin (Red) Levine, her fiancé and an apathetic Vietnam veteran who accepts what life offers him, simply drifting off emotionally when he loses

interest ("You can't get hurt if you don't feel things").

A mindless act forces Alfred's return to "normalcy," and the manner in which he and Patsy's family adjust to that act and adapt themselves to the world in which they live gives one plenty of food for thought.

Ben Levine is excellent as the father, Archie Barker-like "realist." The diminutive Mary Ann Winters has the perfect look as the family-centered mother who knows that life must be good if her family smiles through dinner, and Tim Donovan is effective as Patsy's college-graduate brother, weak of both bladder and backbone.

The role of God in the new society is investigated with enthusiasm by Roster as the dogma-spouting judge and by Tadg Galleran as the hedonistic minister who unburdens himself and mankind of the responsibility of commitment.

Danny Clark and Bill Barron offer some side-splitting moments as the police detectives in search of a logical pattern to 345 unsolved murders in the Big Apple.

One of the better community theater productions of the past several seasons, "Little Murders" is funny, it's tragic, and it leaves, perhaps, too many questions and no answers.

But, from the ashes of anarchy rises the truth. Who said that? Certainly not Jules Feiffer.

Vacaville Reporter - 11/3/78

Theater

Goodtime Comedy

Reporter
Review

By LUANNE STEVENS-HERTH
Reporter Correspondent
Benicia Old Town Theatre Group (BOTTG) has put together a delightful evening of dinner-theatre with its production of Jules Feiffer's "Little Murders."

The Benicia group, under the direction of David C. Roster, has done an outstanding job with this very difficult comedy, displaying a remarkably high level of acting performance overall for an amateur group.

Feiffer's play focuses on the Newquist family — the ultra-conservative father, Carol, who hates his name and wishes his daughter would date less effeminate men, his not-so-bright wife, Marjorie, their effeminate son Kenny, and daughter, Patsy, tall, strong and the "bully" of the family. Patsy brings home her newest friend, Alfred, who, in his disgust with the state of the world, has decided to tune it all out.

Making use of an extreme hyperbolic technique, Feiffer pokes fun at everything from criminals to cops to homosexuals and heterosexuals to marriage and pacifism. Nothing is sacred in "Little Murders."

Among the Benicia cast, Martin "Red" Levine, has created a wondrous Alfred, yet abhors the character.

His successful transition and excellent timing earned a large share of the evening's laughter.

As Patsy, the domineering daughter, Marilyn Schenberg got off to a nervous start at last Friday's opening, but came back to deliver a very assured, commanding performance. Some of her best moments came during her wedding scene, when she utters not a word, but her facial expressions speak volumes.

Ben Levine had some nice moments as Carol Newquist, but must be careful not to "foreshadow" his actions before they occur. Mary Ann Winters was adorable as the tiny Marjorie, but needs to speed up her timing in a few places. Tim Donovan portrayed a suitably peculiar son Kenny.

Some very excellent acting occurred among the minor roles. Tadg Galleran as Henry Dupas might have walked off with the audience in his pocket if he had still been wearing one.

Director David Roster portrayed the Judge with a captivating use of speech, but unfortunately the script is not at its best here. Danny Clark as Detective Practice and Bill Barron as the Second Detective were very funny as two police officers on the verge of nervous breakdown.

The major flaw has to do with a commendable experiment with slide projections. Unfortunately, poor positioning and a noisy projector



BENICIA COMEDY — Starring in "Little Murders," presented by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group, are Danny Practice (left) as L.L. Practice and Ben Levine as Carol Newquist. (Photo Special to The Reporter)

resulted in more distraction than enhancement.

Another easily remedied flaw: As a director once said, "Never be upstaged by your shoes." Crepe soles on hollow wooden floors, please. Or at least some carpeting.

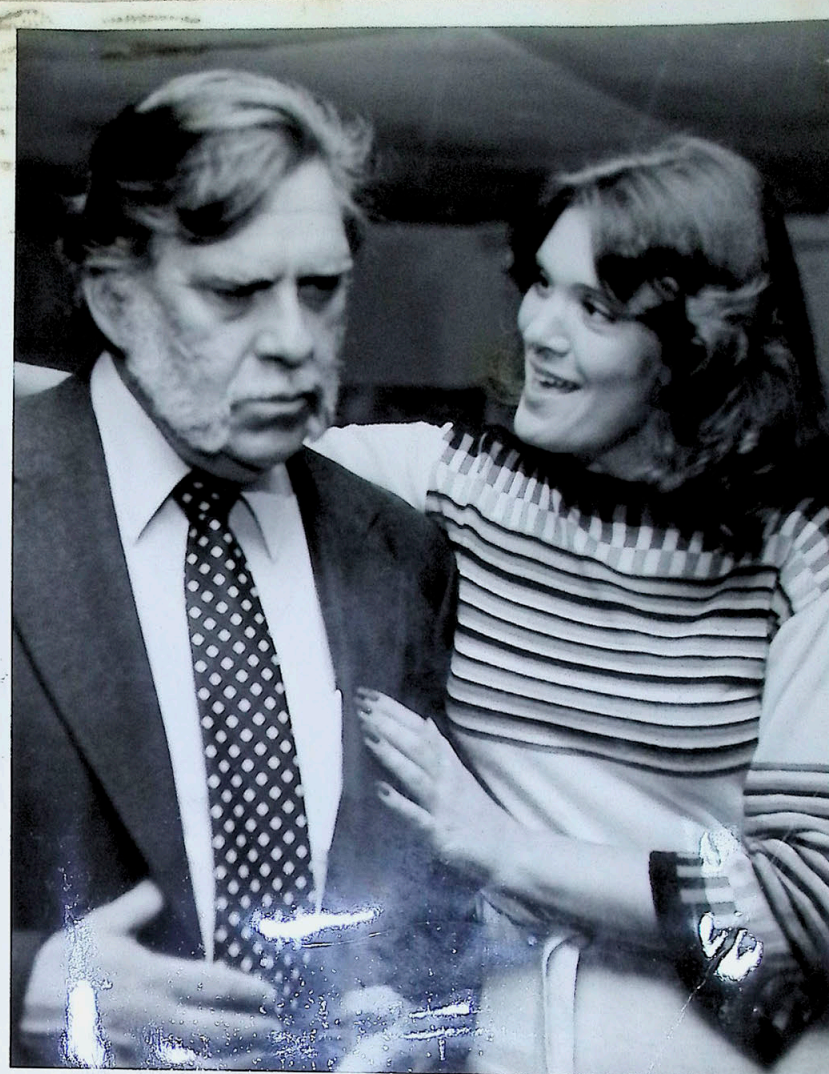
Overall, the performance is com-

elling enough to make the added attraction of dinner unnecessary. It is a nice touch, nevertheless.

"Little Murders" continues weekends through Nov. 25 at the IDES Hall in Benicia. Tickets are \$9.50, including dinner. Reservations are available by phoning 1-745-0130.



Mary Ann Winters Ben Levine Tim Donovan



Ben Levine Marilyn Schoenberg



Tim Donovan Ben Levine M. Winters 'Red' Levine M. Schoenberg

ny Review

Murders' Is A Bit Too Much

By J.N. BRANT
Times Herald Staff Writer

The ironic look at a violence-crazed society provided by Jules Feiffer's "Little Murders" owes to be a bit too bizarre for the average audience.

"Murders," set in contemporary New York City, is the fall production of the Benicia Old Town Theater Group.

Its abstract plot is easy for those seeking pure entertainment to pass off as pure nonsense as the story behind the savage society shown is left unanswered.

Still, on its face without deep philosophical interpretation, the two hours of "Murders" is humorous, refreshingly different and entertaining.

It's the kind of play liberal-minded viewers like away shaking their heads but smiling about. On the other hand, get the urge to like it out after the first act.

At the risk of sounding prudish, one of the men is a trifle too risqué for the mild-mannered tastes at the Benician playhouse. The unnecessary fiction, or deletion as it were, to the script brings embarrassed, nervous laughter which detracts from the scene's brilliantly funny dialogue.

But on the whole, the open-minded will find the play's theatrics and humor enjoyable. For a small town production, some of the acting is of surprisingly high quality.

Ben Levine, who portrays the father of a supposedly normal family, excels as an Archie Bunker-like reasoner. His spontaneous body gestures, natural facial expressions and direct eye contact make his character believable.

The other standout lead in the show is Martin 'Red' Levine who performs in dazed excellence as the son-in-law who would rather daydream while being mugged than fight back. Humming, he contends, overcomes the pain of being beaten.

Two outstanding character actors, however, steal the stage and the audience's approval.

The play's director David Roster dons a judge's robe for a five-minute scene as a Jewish justice of the peace. His kosher character who pauses not once for a breath, delivers an enthusiastic monologue with lecturing hands and inspired shouts of wisdom.

Tadg Galleran, who performs as a reverend of questionable respectability, shocks the play's wedding party (and the audience) with his abundant candor and lack of modesty and pious behavior. His high energy portrayal of this potentially tasteless character is successfully humorous.

The production's contemporary costumes and sets are adequate, but some of the special sound effects are truly superb. The coordinated slide and music show which serves as the play's overture also is good.

GIRL CRAZY
SPRING 1979

The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group
presents



Book by Guy Bolton and Jack McGowan
Music by George Gershwin
Lyrics by Ira Gershwin

Director: Jim Nielsen
Musical Director: Kristy Truelsen

Just Crazy Over That 'Girl Crazy' In Benicia

By ZEL LATNER
Panorama Staff Writer

Dinner theater in the IDES Hall setting of the Benicia Old Town Theater Group is an evening to savor. And I'd like the formula for the caterer's tumbleweed salad. Brightly delicious.

Everybody seemed to be raving about what the dressing did to spinach leaves, mushrooms and bits of egg and bacon and croutons. Menu items were tagged by names in keeping with the Southwest setting of the Gershwin's 1930s musical. Poulet fromage was Texas Jackrabbit, the custard grouseaux citron, durango merango, and the cafeiere, Arizona creosote.

BOTTG has a new caterer this season and thereby hangs the tale of a crazy opening night for the new production, "Girl Crazy." The Alternative of Concord "broke down" — or, some say, got confused and went to Danville. Or was it a Friday night traffic tie-up?

When the dinner didn't show, the cocktail hour went on. And on. Finally the play went on. Finally the caterers came, served salad and by way of apology free drinks for everyone. The stage lit up, the performance sparkled, and the entire was saved for a midnight snack after which the band "jammed a while," and everybody danced. Story goes that only one customer asked for his money back.

When we went backstage after Saturday's show to congratulate the company, leading lady Linda Barron (Kate) reported opening night had been hectic for her. She was having a bout with intestinal flu. She recovered Saturday.

Currently president of BOTTG, the Benicia resident puts on a quite professional performance. Her dance numbers do justice to "I Got Rhythm," for which she appears in a flaming red strapless gown, and her bumps and grinds in "Dellilah" are nice — in net stockings and black and silver scapies.

Kate is hired on as a singer at the hotel's dance hall, where she's stopped off with her "ex," the Hungarian Zoli, also her manager and accompanist.

Dennis Kohles' Zoli delighted the audience, and rightly so. His accent never falters and his lines are fun. The philandering husband wants his wife back. "Can't we let bygones be as bygones?" he pleads.

But Kate wants Johnny (Terry McInerney), ex-movie actor, a left-over on location who's bought a lemon of a cattle ranch which he subsequently turns into a successful dude ranch.

And Johnny wants Molly (Kristy Truelsen), Custerville country girl and mail carrier, who wears a sidearm.

That gun goes off, pointed in the direction of her partner in the ever enchanting "Embraceable You" duet, after Tadg Galleran as Sam, Johnny's jent, arrives on the scene and eventually reveals that while Kate's "hubby" is Zoli, her "hobby" is Johnny.

Molly's innocence is totally blasted by that revelation, plus a baptism in champagne when she seeks the comfort of a date with Sam for the Mexican fiesta.

The two are great in the drinking scene (nicely acted and choreographed) as the plot thickens in the second act and the actors loosen up and begin to relate more convincingly to each other. The duo does a finely controlled laughing scene, and the liberated Molly's wild and woolly "Dellilah Was A Floozy" fits her mood, a sharp contrast to the sentimental "Not For Me," which she sings later with Kate.

Linda Barron, belting out the songs that made Ethel Merman a star (among them, "I've Got Rhythm") is a bright and brassy Frisco Kate, tough as tacks, of course, but with a heart of pure gold. Dennis Kohles is just this



Panorama

Mary Jo Gohlke, Editor

Truelsen is BOTTG's musical director for "Girl Crazy," and is founder and director of a group called Vocal Expression. She has appeared in several Vallejo Group Theatre shows.

Other cast members who have Vallejo connections are quartet members Phil Elpers, a resident of this city; Carl Staedler, who played in VGT's "My Fair Lady;" and Dan Dugan, former Minnesinger and instrumentalist for many VGT musicals.

Adjunct to the boy-meets-girl-loves-girl plot line is, of course, a thread of villainy which allows the hero to triumph over evil when he shows his sterling integrity by ditching theatrical ambitions in favor of running for sheriff.

And, the political game allowed George and Ira Gershwin to write in the rousing "Strike Up The Band." Probably most people who love the song have forgotten for what it was written. But

the composer and lyricist were, all critics recognize, a lot closer to Shubert Alley in those days of the Great Depression than they were in Custerville, Ariz.

Ann Bruno as Belle and Dave Custodio as Snake Eyes are perfectly cast and costumed. They're a colorful pair of heavies.

Custodio is making his first appearance with BOTTG, but has been appearing for several years in area community theater, his most recent role played for Walnut Creek Civic Arts Repertory production of "Torchbearers." Bruno, also a seasoned little theater player who's done several musicals, is from Concord.

Galleran's Sam was a pleasure to watch. Before moving to Benicia, he was a member of the touring cast of "Hair," and did little theater in Los Angeles.

Kohles, experienced as a director as well as an

actor, has done community Arts Theater.

McInerney, manager of a performance, on the footlights since the sixth grade.

The able d Nielsen, is another studying theater College, studied lived in England theater groups.

The play will Fridays and Saturdays at 8:30, d Tickets at \$9.50 per Music, Vallejo, am by phoning 745-0134

Genial volunteers complimented for crew members are (naming which are)

The musical show to have fun hand and for the as fed and dallying on

A thread
of villainy
...allows
the hero to
triumph
over evil
when he
shows
his sterling
integrity

By MAGGIE CRUM

When it comes to dinner theater, it's hard to beat the Benicia Old Town Theater Group, which for several years has combined good food with good theater with good results.

Last weekend George and Ira Gershwin's "Girl Crazy," directed by Jim Nielsen, opened on the second floor of the Benicia Old Town Theater on J Street (take the Second Street exit and head for downtown Benicia.)

We discovered tables attractively set with scarlet cloths, fresh flowers and candles. The no-host cocktail hour started off with a bang at 8:30, dinner was served at 7:15 and the show began promptly at 8:30 by which hour the gourmet theatergoers were so blissful they'd even have forgiven a late curtain.

Dinners are catered by Al Jutz's "Alternative" in Concord. Last Saturday the meal opened with an excellent spinach and fresh mushroom salad. The main course featured fork-tender chicken, carrots and new potatoes with onions. The dessert, a light lemon cake, was accompanied by excellent coffee, served



Kristy Truelsen plays Molly and Terry McInerney appears as Johnny in Town Theater's "Girl Crazy."

from pots on candle warmers on each table. The friendly waitresses and waiters couldn't have been more solicitous, and were still at work taking bar orders during the intermission.

"Girl Crazy," designed as a vehicle for brassy, saucy Ethel Merman and first produced in 1930, includes many of Gershwin's top tunes, such as "I Got Rhythm," "Embraceable You," "Strike Up the Band," and "I've Got a Crush on You."

Director Nielsen writes in the program notes, "Girl Crazy" was about as Western as West End Avenue. For its dialogue, characters and point of view were really closer in spirit to Shubert Alley than to Custerville, Arizona, where a bevy of Broadway chorus girls romped on a dude ranch. Nevertheless, the show provided the backdrop for the Gershwin's most

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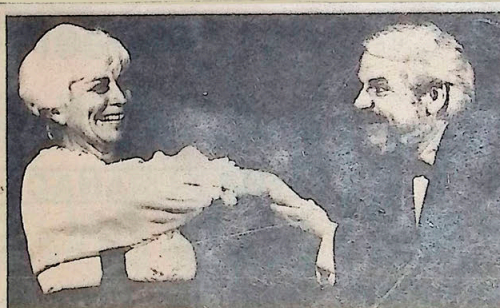
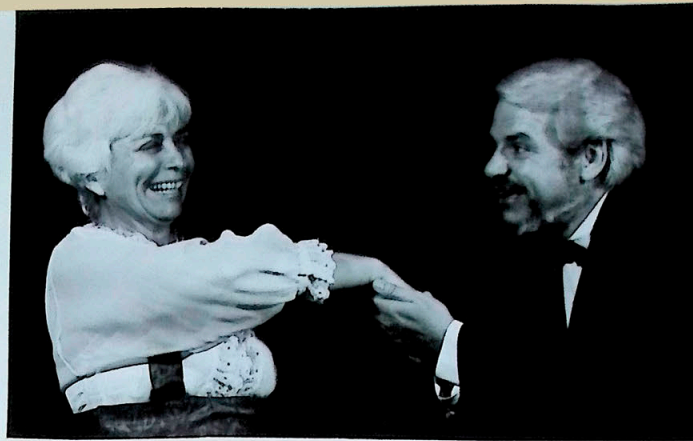
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Barbara McFadden



Fraulein Schneider (Marie Wedell) accepts the proposal of marriage by Herr Schultz (Bob Johnston) in a scene from "Cabaret," the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group production that opened this weekend.

The dinner-theatre production will be presented Fridays and Saturdays through April 30.

B3—Vallejo Independent Press, Sun., March 27, 1983

'Cabaret' Looks Good

By BOB LAWSON

More than six centuries ago, the Italian poet Dante took his readers on a journey through the nether world.

"Cabaret," the musical production that opened a six-week run at the Benicia Old Town Theatre Friday night, is a well-played effort that takes audiences on a 20th century trip through Hell on Earth.

Berlin's Kit Kat Klub during the spring budding of Nazi Germany. Our Vergil is an ornately-painted master of ceremonies, played with great skill by Robert Lewis Hinton, who presides over a collection of whores, bullies, and other elements of a society going down the drain.

Hinton alternates in making the audience forget the troubles outside the cabaret — with such numbers as "Welcome to

Berlin," "Two Ladies," and "Sitting Pretty," not to mention a duet with a gorilla, "If You Could See Her" — and mocking the coming new order in "Tomorrow Belongs to Me" or leading a file of goose-stepping showgirls.

but only Johnston also brings top-notch vocal skills to match McFadden who after all portrays the Kit Kat's top attraction — needs to project more in her singing, particularly on her best number "Cabaret."

Noteworthy in lesser roles were David Custodio as Nazi henchman Ernst, Rene Gallier as the toast of the German Navy, and Lance Hoffman and Wayne Sutton, who showed good singing voices in several supporting parts.

Doug Ham's sets were well done — and credit must also go to the crew that was able to move them for 20 scenes. Joe Barnett's music ensemble performed well, also.

For reservations for the dinner theatre show — continuing on weekends through April 30 — telephone 746-1269.

Theater

ContraCostaTimes Monday, March 28, 1983—Page 7A

Entertainment

Hinton is the master in Benicia's 'Cabaret'

By Maggie Crum
Times theater critic

His darting eyes glitter and dance with evil. His dark hair clings to his scalp like patent leather. Life has no illusion for his master of ceremonies as he welcomes us to the

theater review

reservoirs of Berlin in 1939.

Joel Grey himself could not have been a better master of ceremonies. "Cabaret" than is Robert Hinton in the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group production that electrified an opening night audience Friday at IDES Hall in Benicia.

The emcee must serve as the linchpin uniting rough song and dance, as disparate elements of musical, which had its roots in Christopher Isherwood's "Berlin Stories." Through trivial characters involved in a moral crisis, it depicts unforgettably the emergence of Nazism, and the reluctant to come to a modified peace, gives a sinister, grotesque portrayal of the

performances of the entire cast, under the finely honed direction of Sharon Kinnison Baker.

Dan Johnson plays the ingenious young American writer Clifford Bradshaw, who arrives in Berlin in the late 1930s and is promptly pulled into a world of shadow and drugs, where he functions as an observer or a camera. Johnson has a fine voice and is thoroughly likeable in the role.

Clifford falls in love with Sally Bowles (Barbara McFadden), a capricious American girl who lives only for the giddy moment and is a dancer at the Kit Kat Club. McFadden, vivacious and pretty, gives her all to an energetic and sustained portrayal of Sally. Her voice is true, but not big, and she uses it to the hilt.

Marie Wedell of Orinda gives a warm and sparkling interpretation of Fraulein Schneider, who foresees the future, is too old to escape, but never as an observer or a camera. Johnson has a fine voice and is thoroughly likeable in the role.



Robert Hinton, kneeling, finds life with the Kit Kat Club is a "Cabaret."

and feels he is safe because "I am German." He and Wedell won a round of applause for as they sang "Mornin'."

David Custodio conveys the allied menace of Nazism as Ernst, and Rene Gallier as the toast of the German Navy, and Lance Hoffman and Wayne Sutton, who showed good singing voices in several supporting parts.

the prostitute, Fraulein Schneider. Space precludes mention of the many dancers, sailors, and others in small roles, all of whom show the proficiency that comes from good direction and long rehearsal.

Doug Ham's set design for this show with its 20 scenes is nothing short of

miraculous. The cleverly extended stage at the front serves as the Kit Kat Club, and curtains pull back to reveal a train compartment, Cliff's room, and Herr Schultz' fruit shop. The IDES Hall was designed for fraternal events and programs, not as a theater. I can only marvel at ingenuity and determination that went into this elaborate presentation.

Carol Berman gets credit for the many, many costumes. Particularly effective are the flashy and scanty costumes worn by Sally Bowles (particularly as she does her big "Cabaret" number in the second act) and the Kit Kat girls.

Joe Barnett's energetic and high-kicking choreography catches the mood of the show, and the audience loved it. Barnett also

is the music director.

The BOTTG has the distinction of offering the only dinner-theater combination in the East Bay. The dinner, catered by the Washington House Deli Cafe, included a first-course green salad, a very small serving of breaded chicken breast, a baked dressing with grapes, carrots, rolls, and a delectable gelatin affair topped by strawberries. A bevy of BOTTG supporters were assiduous in providing good service. The price for the dinner and the show is \$16.50.


The dinner-theater performances continue Fridays and Saturdays through April 30 at the IDES Hall, 146 West J St. Benicia. Cocktails at 6:30, dinner at 7:15, curtain at 8:30. Seating assigned by date of reservation. (707) 746-1269.



FALL - 1983
BLITHE SPIRIT

THE BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE GROUP PRESENTS

Noel Coward's *Blithe Spirit*



Directed by Sandra Lanier
Set Design by Doug Ham Costumes by Carol Berman
PROMOTIONAL DESIGN BY BOB HARRIS

Benicia's ghostly delight

By L. PIERCE CARSON
Register Staff Writer

BENICIA — Noel Coward's stage whizzy, "Blithe Spirit," has proved a durable comedy since it premiered in 1942.

It is receiving a faithful, first-rate staging by the able Benicia Old Town Theatre Group in its IDES Hall, 140 West J St., on Friday and Saturday nights through Nov. 19.

Although it's a bit over-written — is that the sound of Coward spinning in his grave? — "Blithe Spirit" is a witty dabble with the occult, a nifty seer named Madame Arcati and the Charles Condomine family, Charles, his wife, Ruth, and his late wife, Elvira, who materializes in ghostly splendor when Madame Arcati conjures up the spirits for Charles' new book.

The spirits really fly when Charles finds he has two wives in the home and can't get rid of either. It's one of those charming British drawing room comedies that either comes off or it doesn't. Well, it's nice to report that director Sandra

Lanier and an emigrant BOTTG cast do Coward proud.

With Carol Berman's wonderful period costumes to drape them and Doug Ham's spiffy countryside manor in which to drape, the BOTTG cast carries it off in fine fashion, with a minor exception.

Looking wonderfully wan, Sylvia Kratins is a delicious Elvira, Georgia Taylor Benedict is a wild and wonderful medium, Dan Clark appropriately befuddled as the husband, and Brooks London and Marie Wedell (she is wonderful with a zippy wig and a dotty outlook) as the Condomine's friends — all contribute to making this a wonderful evening of theater. Rene Galleran needs to work on her part — remembering all the lines would be a good place to start.

As always, Washington House Deli caters a fine meal and no-host cocktails are served from 6:30 p.m. Curtain is at 8:30. Tickets are \$16.50 and worth it. Call 746-1269 for reservations. There will be one non-dinner performance, on Sunday, Nov. 13 at 8 p.m.

'Blithe Spirit' provides much to laugh about

By Abel Kessler
Special to the Times

BENICIA — How to cope with an ex-spouse requires expert advice. But who knows how to handle one who returns from the "great beyond?"

That dilemma is comically covered in "Blithe Spirit" the current dinner-show presentation of the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group which opened here at Ides Hall Friday.

Master of sophisticated male-female relationships, Noel Coward extended his scope in this opus to reach into the astral realm. A skillful, spirited cast frolicked through

theater review

this spoof which, even in this age of unconventional living among the sexes, is still far out.

Directed by Sandra Lanier, this vintage farce owes a great debt to the players who manage to keep interest high despite the often lengthy discourses that somehow lose something with age. The performers fill the gap with sparkle and ability to make enjoyable the presence of the departed who still can bug a husband.

Dan Clark enacts the man who has his deceased first wife return while he is married to his second. The part calls for versatility in a straight portrayal while getting the most laughs possible without clowning. He does just that in the assignment calling for his presence almost entirely in the long three acts.

The hilarious antics of Georgia Taylor Benedict keeps the fun flowing. As the local psychic this sterling actress enlivens the action with a force that never lets the audience's attention stray. The role is 180 degrees different from her dead serious acting last season as the head nurse in the long running "Cuckoo's Nest."

The ordeal of the still living wife, who must compete against the ghost of the first, is handled nicely by Rene Galleran. This is a tough part for the cues often come when the husband is addressing his now-a-spirit initial spouse who the current missus cannot see or hear.

Coward cleverly corrects that confusion with a bit of theatrical "silence that should be witnessed and not divulged."

Sylvia Kratins makes a seductive spirit as the "blithe" first wife. She adds to the laugh production with her moves and delivery of lines. She even convinces the audience that a ghost can physically attract her ex-lover. That's out of this world allurements.

When the spirits get angry and things start to fly in the poltergeist proceedings, the ingenious and attractive set created by Doug Ham becomes a feature that deserves top billing. Ham, whose sets have graced many local productions, outdid even his top-rated efforts in this one.

Marie Wedell and Brooks London contribute fine support as the doctor and his wife. Andrea Gorman humorously stumps about as the heavy-footed servant. Later she becomes a prime mover in getting the spirits back to their own world.

A tightening of the speaking segments possibly would enhance the play and get the audience home before midnight.

Vallejo Independent Press
10-19-83

Coward Play In Benicia

By BOB LAWSON

The ghostly and ghastly consequences of a merry medium's successful patch-through with the Other Side make for a humorous evening in the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's fall production of Noel Coward's "Blithe Spirit," which opened a six-weekend run last Friday night at the IDES Hall in Benicia.

Other than a long running time of more than three hours — Coward, like latter-day Neil Simon, never makes do with a single joke or witty comment when he can insert a half dozen or so — Benicia's is a generally pleasing production which should fare well.

Speaking of fare, dinner theater-goers were able to prepare for the long evening's entertainment ahead with one of the best meals I can recall at BOTTG. The roast pork loin with plum sauce, dilled carrots, chesecake, and freshly-baked bread with sesame seeds earn the Washington House Deli a "star" along with the "Blithe Spirit" cast and director Sandra Lanier.

Georgia Taylor Benedict is a show-stealer as the medium, Madame Arcati, who complicates the life of writer Charles Condomine (Dan Clark) by conjuring up the ghost of his former wife (Sylvia Kratins), an event that causes some consternation for his living one (Rene Galleran).

Clark, Kratins and Galleran handle their high society banter surrounding this menage a trois well. After the initial shock of having his first wife return as a ghost, "Clark quickly resumes his posture as the unfazed aristocrat. Kratins is appropriately sensuous and earthy, while Galleran, despite a few line fluffs, did well in portraying the shrewishness of Wife No. 2.

Handling their parts well in supporting roles were Andrea Gorman as a double-time maid and Brooks London and Marie Wedell as the Condomines' society friends.

Doug Ham has again designed a stunning set for this production and — we don't want to reveal too much in this regard — it doesn't just sit there. Lighting is adequate, save for one annoying effect; several scenes are supposedly played with daylight outside, but light coming through windows and doors is no different than that of the night scenes.

The show will be

presented Fridays at Saturdays through Nov. 19. Tickets are \$16.50 if the dinner show or reservations are required at least a day in advance for reservations tel phone 746-1269.

No-host cocktails begin at 6:30, with dinner at 7:15 and the show 8:30.

One non-dinner performance — tickets a \$6.50 — will be presented at 8 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 13.

4-Benicia Herald, Friday, October 21, 1983

Delightful tale of friendly spirits BOTTG's 'Blithe Spirit' a must

By Mary Ellen Dennen

Noel Coward's classic comedy of the occult, "Blithe Spirit," opened here in Benicia last weekend. The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group begins its 19th season of dinner theatre with this British farce, a hilarious trip through time and space with Madame Arcati and the spirits she attempts to summon from the other side.

Another fine example of community theatre (the cast, crew and production staff nearly to a person are local residents), the play is a must for

anyone who enjoys a good laugh.

Doug Ham, the technical director, created a most exquisite set, the living room-library of Charles Condomine's house in Kent, England. The room is filled with lovely antiques donated by a local antique dealer. Ham's reputation for attention to detail is surpassed in this effort; the room is breathtaking.

Carol Berman, BOTTG's inexhaustible costume designer, meets the challenge of 1940's dress design with style and flair. Her use of color, texture and sparkle support the mood of the characters and setting.

Director Sandra Lanier and her talented cast lead the audience through Coward's improbably journey to meet the friendly spirits who answer the call of the seance.

Dan Clark plays Charles Condomine, a very proper English author. He decides to get some first-hand research for a new book he's about to write and calls on Madame Arcati to hold a seance.

Clark, a veteran BOTTG member is a

charming, endearing and properly frustrated Charles. In this particular role Clark deserves a special trouper award.

He was asked to fill in as Charles just three weeks before the show opened. This is only mentioned to spotlight his fine performance. He is in control throughout the three acts.

Also especially noteworthy as Madame Arcati, Georgia Taylor Benedict is a delight. Her energy breaks through the British reserve and the astral plane, to keep things rolling along.

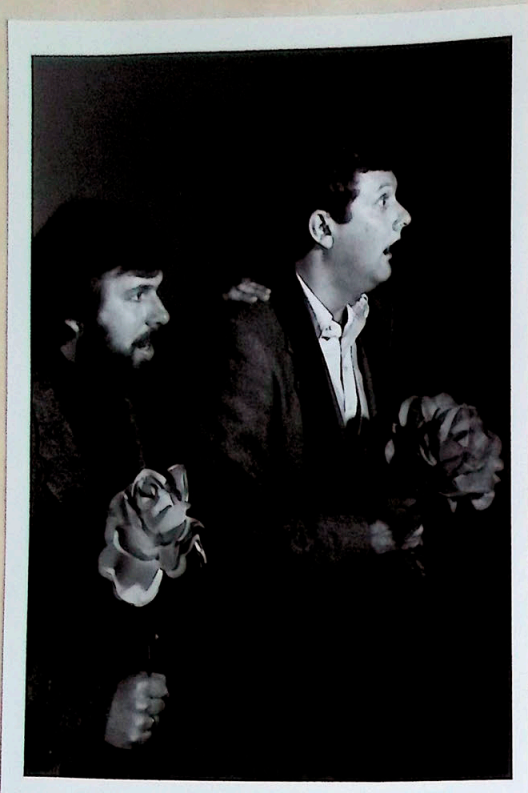
The entire cast is excellent, as is the delicious dinner served by the Washington House Deli.

The timing is right with Halloween right around the corner for a delightful tale of spirits of a friendly nature. This production will be presented Friday and Saturday evenings through November 19 at the IDES Hall, 140 West J St.

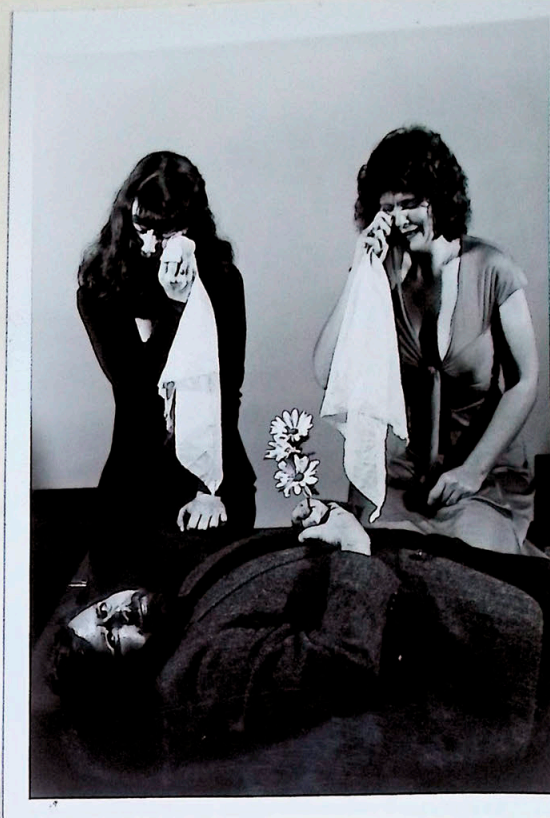
Reservations are necessary and may be made by calling 746-1269. Table seating is arranged by date of ticket reservation, so early reservations are suggested.



A startled Charles (Dan Clark) spies the ghostly Elvira (Sylvia Kratins) for the first time in "Blithe Spirit."



David Ball Fred Franklin



Leslie Monthan Marilyn Schoenberg
David Ball



Marilyn Schoenberg and Leslie Monthan will star in the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group production of the musical 'Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris,' running Friday and Saturday evenings, Jan. 28 - Feb. 12, at the IDES Hall, 140 West J St. in Benicia. Tickets, at \$5.50 in advance or \$6.50 at the door, are available at 746-1269.

An evening of wine and song Vocal standouts in 'Brel'

By Linda Sell

An evening of wine and song awaits patrons of the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's newest show, 'Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris.' The music of the Belgian-born singer/songwriter is pleasingly performed in this production, which highlights Brel's talent for composing haunting, melodic and acerbic songs that capture his perceptions of the world around him.

Brel's music becomes a commentary on

everything from the jollies of romance to the follies of politics, bound together by a slim thread of personal philosophy that makes for an entertaining and thought-provoking show. Musical director Joe Barnett does a fine job with the four voices in his cast, and lends his considerable talents as a pianist to the production as well.

Leslie Monthan and Fred Franklin are vocal standouts, Monthan offering up a particularly beautiful rendition of 'Marieke' and Franklin exhibiting great versatility, from the comic 'Bachelor's Dance' to the stirring 'Amsterdam.'

Marilynn Schonberg has a sweet and lilting voice, well-suited for the song 'Old Folks', but a bout with laryngitis kept her from projecting the strong, interpretive vocals needed for such potential show-stoppers as 'Sons of--' and 'Carousel'.

David Ball, while giving us an especially pleasing, puckish version of 'Funeral Tango' was also lacking in volume, an essential to successfully carrying off dramatic songs such as 'The Bulls,' Brel's caustic criticism of the Vietnam war.

Opening night jitters may have sapped the cast of the vocal strength that this production demands, but they must develop the confidence to belt out Brel's biting lyrics if the show is to reach its full potential.

Stage director Doug Ham, who returns to the BOTTG after directing a recent production for the Lafayette Dramateurs, moves his characters well on an appropriately bleak set.

In all, 'Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris' is a very enjoyable show, perhaps one of the best ever done by the BOTTG. Accolades should be paid to the group for aspiring to something beyond their usual dinner theatre format. Go and enjoy this tribute to one of the finest contemporary composers of our time.



Leslie Monthan in 'Brel'.

CABARET — SPRING 1983

4-Benicia Herald, Wednesday, April 6, 1983

Two non-dinner 'Cabaret' performances are added

The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group is pleased to announce the addition of two non-dinner performances to its current dinner-theatre run of the captivating musical 'Cabaret'. The two Sunday evening shows, April 17 and 24, will have an 8 p.m. curtain at the IDES Hall, 140 West J St. in Benicia.

A no-host bar will be open to serve beer and wine. Tickets, at \$6.50 per person, are available at Scott Lyall's Clothes for

Men, 737 First St., Benicia or by calling the BOTTG reservations number (707) 746-1269. Some tickets may be available at the door.

'Cabaret' continues as dinner-theater on Friday and Saturday evenings through April 30. Shows on April 16 and 23 are already sold out, with other Saturday performances approaching the limit. Some tickets are still available for all Friday performances. No-host cocktails are

served from 6:30 with dinner at 7:15 and an 8:30 curtain.

The dinner menu includes a fresh green salad with creamy Italian dressing, chicken breast in an orange and butter sauce with grapes, herbed rice, fresh vegetable, rolls and butter, coffee or tea and Russian Creme for dessert.

Tickets at \$16.50 include dinner and the show. Reservations are necessary and may be made by calling (707) 746-1269.

Some Sunday seats left 'Cabaret' sold out

The remaining Friday and Saturday dinner-show performances of the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group musical 'Cabaret' are sold out. There are some seats available, however, for the two added Sunday evening performances on April 17 and 24, although these non-dinner dates are also filling up fast.

Sunday evening curtain time is 8 p.m. A beer and wine bar will be available from 7 p.m. Reservations may be made by calling (707) 746-1269. Tickets are \$6.50.

'Cabaret' earned unanimously enthusiastic reviews from area critics and audiences seem to agree. The show stars Robert Hinton of Vallejo as the provocative emcee,

with Dan Johnson of Benicia as Cliff and Barbara McFadden of Fairfield as Sally Bowles. Performances are at the IDES Hall, 140 West J St. in Benicia. Tickets may be purchased at Scott Lyall's Clothes for Men, 737 First St. in Benicia.

weekend

18 — TIMES-HERALD, Vallejo — Friday, April 1, 1983



Kit Kat Club dancers surround 'Cabaret' emcee Robert Hinton in Benicia.

Come to 'Cabaret' — it's worth it

By DIANE MANN
Times-Herald staff writer

BENICIA — "Cabaret" paints a vivid picture of deviant sexuality, superficial relationships and political power struggles in the setting of a murky, smoke-filled nightclub.

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's latest production is perhaps best in creating the tenuous political climate of Berlin in the 1920's, when celebration and good times covered, at least temporarily, the

review

drinking and dancing, and relationships that stop when the fun does create a tenuous balance of gaiety and heartache in a world of carefree pleasure, while the threat of political disaster looms.

Undoubtedly, the production's shining star is Robert Hinton as the master of ceremonies.

He's appropriately kinky, especially in numbers such as "Two Ladies," where he sings of his ménage-a-trois situation, boasting that "nothing beats threes."

His permanently puckered mouth, brightly painted in the classic angles immortalized by the original Joel Grey character, emitted shocking stories of sex — sometimes with an ape — and jolly romps through the sheets with most anyone who'd be interested, or interesting.

Hinton's dance movements were slightly stilted at times, but the choreography was fine, with some delightful moments when the small, wiry Hinton is

poked, pinched and swung around the stage by his bizarre lovers.

Barbara McFadden as Sally Bowles — the show low, only slightly talented cabaret show girl — has some good moments, but lacks the vocal power needed for climactic numbers like "Cabaret."

Her dancing is good, but the part could have been much stronger if her voice filled her songs. She also slightly missed capturing the sordid Sally Bowles character.

As expected, Bowles falters in her love for Cliff Bradshaw, played by Dan Johnson, but there's little to tell why she clings to the cabaret where she's more than a mediocre singer, probably hired in exchange for sexual favors to her employer.

McFadden is cute and sexy, but could have more fully developed Sally Bowles' fear of commitment, responsibility and love.

Bowles might be afraid of many more things, and for some very interesting reasons, but there's not enough evidence of the inner self to make Bowles an interesting character.

The play is delightful and energetic, however, illustrated by Johnson's performance as Bradshaw. Johnson has a beautiful, full voice and is believable and natural in his love scenes with McFadden. As Cliff, Johnson also shows genuine strength and heartache in dealing with misfortune and love.

His opposition to the rising Nazi party and his conflicts with Bowles' inability to maintain a mature relationship are understandable and realistic.

Much of the quality of the production, directed by Sharon Kinnison Baker, is in the struggle of the aging



BARBARA MCFADDEN
...portrays Sally Bowles in 'Cabaret'

Cabaret

(Continued from page 17)

lovers Fraulein Schneider and Herr Schultz, played by Marie Wedell and Bob Johnston. Their love and conflicts are also very genuine and deal with the political limitations of German society at the dawn of the Jewish holocaust.

Wedell and Johnston deliver fine performances as the elderly couple trying to escape solitude in their love for each other.

The production is also highlighted by the bumping, grinding dance steps of the lace-and-garter-belted Kit Kat Dancers, who are every bit the bawdy, bizarre sexual toys symbolic of the cabaret.

Choreography and vocal performances by the chorus of German soldiers are also very good. Their songs of political times to come all feature beautiful harmony and the determined enthusiasm of the Nazi party.

One of the most provocative numbers in the show, "If You Could See Her," in which the master of ceremonies sings of his love for an ape, is a poignant statement of the anti-Semitism rising in Germany. It effectively ridicules, through exaggeration, the anti-Semitic sensibility.

Music for the dinner-theater production, which continues 6:30 p.m. today and Saturday at IDES Hall, 140 W. J St. 6:30 p.m., is also delightful, under direction of Joe Barnett.

This is an entertaining, energetic production that leaves the audience with plenty to think about.

Tickets for the production, which continues Fridays and Saturdays through April 30, are \$16.50 and available by calling 746-1269.

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group
Presents

Directed by
Sharon Kinnison Baker

Musical Direction and
Choreography by Joe Barnett

Set Design by Doug Nam

Costumes by Carol Berman

Seductive spell cast by Emcee Robert Hinton / 'Cabaret' explodes on stage

By Linda Sell

"Willkommen, mesdames and messieurs, to ze Cabaret," beckons the Master of Ceremonies, and the theatre explodes in a profusion of scantily-clad dancers, flashing lights, garish make-up and song.

Welcome indeed, to the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's presentation of the sassy musical that, under the skillful direction of Sharon Kinnison-Baker, sets frivolity and romance against a backdrop of dark commentary on the horrors of the Nazi regime.

Master of Ceremonies Robert Hinton is the show, casting his archly seductive spell through the story line. His demeanor is sexy, silken, puckish and strangely hypnotic as he weaves his diabolical web of intrigue and sensuality around the audience.

Dan Johnson sings beautifully and gives a fine performance as the lovable, naive American writer Cliff Bradshaw, who is thrust into the hawdy nether-world of Berlin during its heyday as the sin capitol of eastern Europe. Here he falls prey to the allure of nightclub performer Sally Bowles, played by Barbara McFadden, and finds himself on the receiving end of a harsh dose of reality.

McFadden brings a rather overdone measure of enthusiasm to her role, but moves well on stage and will likely settle more comfortably in to this difficult part.

Standouts include Willa Lampi and Leslie Monahan doubling as Kit Kat Klub sleazes and as the M.C.'s trashy playmates in their number "Two Ladies," which defies any description other than outrageous.

Also notable in this production is Rene Galleran as Fraulein Kost, the friendly neighborhood hooker who brings a little life into the boarding house run by Fraulein Schneider, who is played with depth and style by Marie Wedell.

Her male counterpart, Bob Johnston as Herr Schultz, a humbling, endearing figure who sadly deludes himself into believing that even though he is Jewish he will not suffer at the hands of the Nazis because he is, after all, a German first and foremost. Some touching scenes and fun songs are performed by Johnston and Wedell.

David Custodio is very effective as Ernst Ludwig, as he befriends Cliff and takes an ardent interest in his behalf, all the while surreptitiously engaged in furthering the aims of the fledgling Nazi party.

Production Designer Doug Ham has created a masterpiece with the complex set of this show, providing the snazzy environs of the Kit Kat Klub in addition to detailed interiors of a train compartment, Cliff's room, the boarding house foyer and Herr Schultz's fruit shop.

The talent of Musical Director/Choreographer Joe Barnett is lovingly injected into the song and dance routines, and the result is a tasty smorgasbord of the bright and bizarre.

Carol Berman has once again demonstrated her skill at costume design, producing many elaborate outfits for Sally and some pretty naughty nightclub garb for the bevy of Kit Kat dancers.

Supporting cast members are too numerous to mention individually, but all lend their considerable talents very successfully to this show.

Accolades must go to the vampish Kit Kat girls, who bump, grind and slink through the club with some fine dancing and singing. The taunting sexuality and brash, almost bitter detachment they exhibit speaks to this point in history when self-indulgence, both on personal and political levels, commanded the ultimate price of human compassion, with cataclysmic results.

Tickets for 'Cabaret', at \$16.50, which includes a pleasant but rather ordinary dinner, are available by calling 746-1269.



Leslie Monahan ... a Kit Kat Klub temptress.

'Wilderness' as good today as yesterday

By LAURA R. THOMAS
Times Herald-Panorama editor

BENICIA — With its theme of a good youth flouting with radical politics, alcohol and low women while testing his elders' values, Eugene O'Neill's "Ah, Wilderness" is a play which has withstood the test of time.

For O'Neill, his highly successful play and only comedy was a glance backward at an age he felt represented the "real America": small towns, closely knit middle-class families and simple decency.

For viewers in 1982, "Ah, Wilderness" is both familiar and strange. The story is familiar, but the issues are isolated and difficult to relate to. The shock the Miller family feels at their son Richard's night on the town with a chorus girl appears charming and amusing to us. Their forgiveness when he is remorseful seems appropriate.

The patience and understanding displayed by the Miller family for the son is something every family has experienced and in what keeps "Ah, Wilderness" a popular play.

Those who buy a ticket to Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's current production of "Ah, Wilderness" will be satisfied.

The show has a lively pace, is well acted, expertly staged and directed and some of the scenes are memorable.

One of the standouts is the family's Fourth of July dinner when Uncle Sid, played by David J. Winter, arrives late from a party of "old friends" in a drunken condition. He sits down and proceeds to drink his soup straight from the bowl while talking boldly and brassy about women "whose hair sizes and lips are fireworks."

He tells the youngest child he invented lobster while cracking the lobster shells with his teeth.

Despite his obvious impropriety at the dinner table, Sid is so funny that the family members including the maiden aunt Lily, played by Marlene Grindling, laugh in spite of themselves.

Unfortunately, son Richard, played by Liam O'Brien,



LIAM O'BRIAN AND ANDREA GORMAN
...Playwright O'Neill's young and in love couple

finds alcohol doesn't make him happy and funny like Uncle Sid but happy and sick. Dejected because his true love Muriel was forced by her father, played by Doug Ham, to break off their romance, Richard agrees to go out on the town with an older college boy and a couple of "swift" women from New Haven.

In another hilarious scene, Richard is caught in a dive with a tart named Belle, played by Katherine

review

O'Neill, who chides him on his innocence and then tries to bed him in a \$2 room upstairs while he shakes in his chair in terror at the thought.

Richard eventually give her \$5 to let him off the hook and then, emboldened with liquor, falls happily into her lap before being kicked out of the bar for being under age.

Richard is confronted the next morning by his father, Nat, played with a lot of style by Jim Harper, who tries to warn him about such women and find a suitable punishment. Nat is the town's newspaper editor who possesses a tad bit more tolerance and appreciation for his son's literary tastes and political opinions than current convention and his wife would like.

Of course, Nat can't find it in his heart to punish his wayward son and lets him off. Father and son exchange an embrace that tugs at the heart.

Richard and Muriel, played by Benicia High School senior Andrea Gorman, reconfirm their love the next day on the beach in a scene that reminds one how gay boy relationships have changed in 75 years.

The all-important turn of the century mood of the play is supported by fine characterizations by Gloria Kipsey as Essie Miller, Jeremy Lampi as Tommy, Randy Huntimer as Arthur, Heather Maharry as Mildred, Gary Coe as Wint, Claudia Keppel Yuhas as the Irish maid, Norah, Brian Barron as the bartender and Terrance McDermott as the salesman.

The Victorian parlor and dining room are well done with vintage furnishings by Patti McClain.

The play runs through Nov. 20 on Friday and Saturday nights. There is a 8:30 p.m. curtain time preceded by a catered dinner and cocktails beginning at 6:30 p.m. Tickets cost \$15 per person and must be reserved by calling 746-1269.

UTH 10/19/82

Benicia Old Town Play A Pleasant Diversion

By BOB LAWSON

The morning paper reminds us that more than 10 million people are - out of work, the nuclear arms race is escalating, and the situation in the Middle East is going from bad to worse.

Thank goodness, on weekend evenings for the next five weeks, there is a respite from this stress on state of the IDES Hall in Benicia, where the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group is presenting Eugene O'Neill's "Ah, Wilderness!"

It is a sensitive, but not overly - sentimentalized, portrayal of a time and milieu (middle class America in 1906) we don't know for sure ever existed but hope it did.

The BOTTG production of this comedy, directed by Edward Weingold, is well done and was well-received by the opening night audience last Friday.

Liam O'Brien is outstanding as Richard, the high school senior trying

to steer the straight course to true love and manhood without succumbing to such enticing detours as painted ladies in the town's roadhouse. O'Brien is particularly effective in portraying youth — he's actually a few years older than Randy Huntimer, who plays his older brother — in what is generally a well-cast play.

Jim Harper and Gloria Kipsey, as the father and mother, set the tone of family warmth and humor in this production and interplay well in a comedic sense the days of old when men were men and women were women; in short, Mother tells Father Richard must be punished, Father agrees, and then Mother says, "But not too much."

The other children in the family — played by Huntimer, Heather Maharry, and Jeremy Lampi — are also portrayed effectively by genuine Benicia youngsters, all making their BOTTG debuts.

Added comedy comes from David J. Winter as poor drunk Uncle Sid and Marlene Grindling as Sid's long-suffering fiancée, spinster Lily, as well as Irish maid Claudia Yuhas.

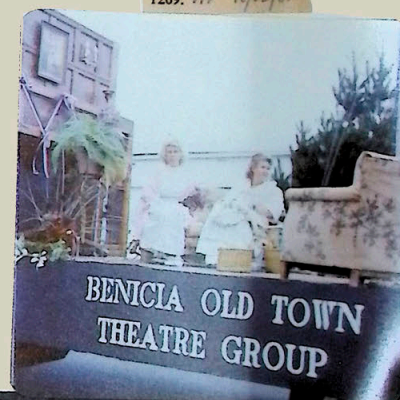
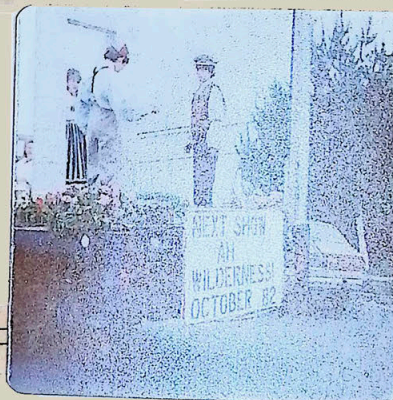
Outside the family, performances of note were turned in by Katherine O'Neill as the tart at the bar, Gary Coe as the Yale man who entices Richard to enjoy a night on the town, and Brian Barron as a surly Irish bartender.

Rounding out the cast are Andrea Gorman as Richard's girl friend, Doug Ham as her stuffy father, and Terrance McDermott as a traveling salesman.

Doug Ham's set is effective in conveying the sense we're being taken back to the era of Ragtime, as are period costumes designed by Carol Berman.

The dinner-theatre production continues on Fridays and Saturdays through Nov. 20. No-host cocktails start at 6:30 p.m., with dinner — a RuBaiyat over rice is the entree — at 7:15 and the show at 8:30.

Advance reservations are required and may be made by telephoning 746-1269. YTH 10/19/82



4 Benicia Herald, Wednesday, October 20, 1982

People and events

Ah, fine theatre... Ah, fine food....

'Ah, Wilderness!' is a winner

By Linda Sell

Ah, fine local theatre... Ah, good food... 'Ah, Wilderness!' by Eugene O'Neill opened at the IDES Hall this weekend, and if the first performances are any indication, the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group has a winning combination on their hands.

Written in 1932, this O'Neill comedy is given a whimsical and well-paced treatment under the direction of Edward Weingold, who guides hero Richard Miller (Liam O'Brien) through the impetuosity of youth, political philosophy and affairs of the heart with sensitivity and humor.

Costumed brilliantly by Benician Carol Berman, the characters move on perhaps one of the finest sets ever designed by Doug Ham, another local whose talents lend an air of professionalism to this production.

O'Brien's characterization of Richard Miller is altogether endearing and thought-provoking, as we see this young puppy struggle through a series of tussles between his conscience and a young man's lust for political rebellion and, well, just plain lust.

Gloria Kipsey as his loving and solicitous mother Essie does an outstanding job of

teetering between offerings of womanly wisdom and maternal hysteria, according to O'Neill's classic script. She adds immeasurably to this production with her fine stage presence and beautiful inflection.

Jim Harper as father Nat Miller is suitably gruff and hard-nosed about his business and his family, but he lets us see what a softy he is underneath it all by projecting the continual image of a downright good sport weathering life's little traumas with humor and compassion.

Not enough can be said about the character of Sid as portrayed by David Winters, a good-natured sot whose role in the Miller family vacillates between counselor and court jester when too much of the grape leaves him in his cups on more than one occasion.

Winters seizes the part with gusto and renders a fine comic portrayal of the man whose unrequited love for Aunt Lily (Marlene Grindling) will never come to fruition because of his regrettable proclivity for drink and nasty women.

A fine performance is also turned in by Katherine O'Neill as the charming bar tart whose attempts to seduce the unwitting



Nat (Jim Harper) tries to be firm with son Richard (Liam O'Brien) in BOTTG's 'Ah, Wilderness!'

and virginal Richard (for a price) provide us with some great giggles. Mention must also be made here of the Bartender (Brian Barron) whose softly smarmy asides further enhance the bar room scenes.

Go and see for yourself why after 50 years, 'Ah, Wilderness!' remains a very good time with it. The show runs Friday and Saturday evenings through Nov. 20. For reservations and ticket information, call 746-1269.



TRUE LOVE IN BENICIA COMEDY

The course of true love is running smoothly — for the moment — with Liam O'Brien and Andrea Gorman in the forthcoming Benicia Old Town Theatre Group production of Eugene O'Neill's "Ah, Wilderness." The dinner theatre production opens Oct. 15 at the

IDES Hall in Benicia and will run Fridays and Saturdays for six weekends. Tickets, covering dinner and the show, are \$15 and advance reservations are required. For reservations and information, telephone 746-1269. YTH 10/19/82 Photo: Jim Sell



JACQUES BREL IS ALIVE AND WELL
AND LIVING IN PARIS

FIRST WINTER SHOW - 1983

JACQUES BREL

IS
ALIVE
AND WELL
AND LIVING
IN PARIS

Directed by Doug Ham
Musical Direction by Joe Barnett

2/3/83

Entertainment

'Jacques Brel' alive and well in Benicia

By Maggie Crum
Times theater critic

BENICIA — If you're feeling depressed, unloved, worried about the future, afraid of growing old, think twice before seeing "Jacques Brel Is Alive and Well and Living in Paris," the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group production that opened last weekend at IDES Hall.

On the other hand, if you thrill to addictive music that pulls at the heart strings and envelops

you in its passionate lament, don't miss this tribute to the famous cabaret singer of the 1950s.

He said he wrote as he did because "I'm in rapport with the world." His world, however, is skewed and ugly. According to the title, he is "well," but his world is a carousel, a marathon, that whirrs in a never-ending frenzy. The people on the carousel are puppets on strings and the only escape is death, "which waits for us all."

Nevertheless, Brel makes us laugh and he does extend a wisp of hope in the last of the 25 songs on the program. "If we only have love," he says, "terms open wide, the young and the old will stand at our side."

An evening with Jacques Brel would be a failure if you didn't feel a few shivers race up and

David Ball and Fred Franklin combine their talents in "Jacques Brel Is Alive and Well and Living in Paris."

down your spine. The Benicia production, directed by Doug Ham, provides the an admirable siege of tingles. The four performers — who must have

worked like troupers — have somehow mastered the mercurial changes of pace and mood, the songs that start so slowly and swirl to a crescendo, the bravado,

the gaiety, the despair that is Brel. As an ensemble and individually, they make their mark.

Leslie Monahan, who caresses her words and music, is outstanding in "I Loved," with its bitter but funny conclusion, and in "No, Love, You're Not Alone." Marilyn Schonberg, a spirited singer, shows her depth as the lead singer in the mournful description of "Old Folks," who "never die; they just bow their heads and hold each other's hands."

The two men — Fred Franklin and David Ball — combine their talents in the amusing "Girls and Dogs." Franklin gives a lusty, pictorial rendition of "Amsterdam" and David Ball shows wry wit in "Funeral Tango."

The musical director, Joe Barnett, is also the pianist and he is wonderfully skilled in conveying the many moods and tempos of the music. Stylized choreography, sleekly tailored to Brel, brightens this production.

For the first time, the repertory is not offering dinner with the show. But you'll not go hungry or thirsty. Cheese boards, hot garlic bread and fruit baskets will satisfy theatergoers who get the munchies. And you may toast the most deserving cast and directors with a glass of wine or beer.

Performances are at 8:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday through Feb. 12. For reservations phone (707) 746-1285.

0386

Friday, January 28; Saturday, January 29
Friday, February 4; Saturday, February 5
Friday, February 11; Saturday, February 12

Name _____

Number in Party _____

Date Sold _____

BENICIA
OLD TOWN THEATRE GROUP
IDES Hall, 140 West J Street, Benicia

Friday, January 28; Saturday, January 29
Friday, February 4; Saturday, February 5
Friday, February 11; Saturday, February 12

**Jacques Brel is Alive
and Well and Living in Paris**

Beer and Wine served from 7:30
Curtain at 8:30
\$5.50/advances \$6.50/at the door

0386

B7 — Vallejo Independent Press, Sunday, Jan. 30, 1983

'Brel' Faring Well In Benicia

By BOB LAWSON

Jacques Brel really is not alive and well, but his music is. And, you can enjoy it in Benicia for the next two weekends.

The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group opened a special winter cabaret-style production of "Jacques Brel Is Alive and Well and Living in Paris" Friday night at the IDES Hall. It is a pleasing two-hour presentation of about 25 songs by Belgian-French composer-performer Brel, who died in 1978 at the age of 49.

It is not a musical play, but rather a continuing series of songs with dramatic accompaniment performed by Fred Franklin, Leslie Monahan, David Ball, and Marilyn Schonberg, with outstanding piano backup by Joe Barnett. The production is directed by Doug Ham.

Monahan is particularly outstanding with a beautiful voice in such songs as "My Death," "I Loved," and the Flemish song "Marieke," moods of which range from great seriousness to the comedy of a pined young woman who finds she's suddenly forgotten her ex-lover's name.

Schonberg offers her talents in such pieces as "Old Folks," "Carousel," and "Sons Of --," the latter a familiar piece to American audiences and popularized by Judy Collins.

Franklin, who has played musical comedy roles in Benicia twice before, brings great diversity and energy to his offerings. We expect

him to be great in comic numbers such as "Bachelor's Dance" or "Girls and Dogs" (a duet with Ball), but his mellow, yet powerful voice, gives a great emotional power to the likes of "Amsterdam" and "Fanette" which overcomes his tendency to lisp.

Ball's voice can be gruff, but is well suited the saloon-type songs he has, such as "Jackie" and "The Bulls."

As a quartet, the players show best in "The Desperate Ones" and the concluding stirring "If We Only Have Love."

Barnett's piano work is wonderful, including a nice touch in which he strokes the strings in "My Death."

Theater



David Ball and Fred Franklin: clever performance.

Benicia's 'Brel' truly alive and well

By DIANE MANN
Times Herald staff writer

BENICIA — Delightful probably best describes Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of "Jacques Brel Is Alive and Well and Living in Paris," which continues here this weekend.

The collection of Brel's sentimental, humorous, romantic and sometimes hardy songs is refreshing and touching, largely so through the high-quality vocal talents of the four-member cast.

The musical review has no plot, but audiences will be artfully entertained by the emotion of Brel's music, which ranges from light humor to tragedy.

Some of the comedy, especially about romance and death, features a Dorothy Parker-type twist, tossing off all sentimentality for the sake of humor.

One song, for example, laments the heartbreak of losing a cherished lover, whose name is somehow suddenly forgotten in the depths of the lover's grief.

Although slightly irreverent, the production is in good taste and leaves the more curious viewer wondering how far Brel's other works might go in attempting to shock.

Don't doubt, though, that there's plenty of shock effect in the Brel production, especially for conservative viewers.

The songs, skillfully performed by David Ball, Fred Franklin, Leslie Monahan and Marilyn Schonberg, come across beautifully, in both solo and group arrangements.

Harmony is impressive in numbers like "Madeleine," a vaudeville-style song about the romantic virtues of the woman behind the title.

The straw hat and cane theme carries over to several other numbers, all cleverly performed, but sometimes flawed by choreographic weaknesses and the actors simply falling out of step. There's a good chance that problem will be worked out in later performances, however.

review

That flaw marks the low point of the show, which mostly sparkles with energy, emotion and exceptional vocal quality.

Audiences might be surprised to recognize a few of Brel's songs from contemporary recordings, like "Sons of --," recorded several years ago by Judy Collins. It is beautifully resurrected here in a solo by Schonberg.

Most of the numbers, however, will be unfamiliar and unique in their rhythm and lyrics.

Monahan surely drew tears from more than just one viewer with her dramatic presentation of "My Death." Similar reactions are assured in her performance of "No Love, You're Not Alone."

The women were especially strong, but Franklin and Ball provided plenty of vocal support and very human, and cleverly humorous, characterizations in their songs.

While the show runs the gamut of emotions, it ends confirming the value of life and living.

The finale number, "If We Only Have Love," leaves the audience smiling about one of life's timeless truths, but not without a reminder of the conflicts and pain of living.

The production, which marks the first time the group has attempted three shows in one season, is light and simple, but not without substance.

It shouldn't be missed by those who love music that reflects human emotion and the conflicts of living.

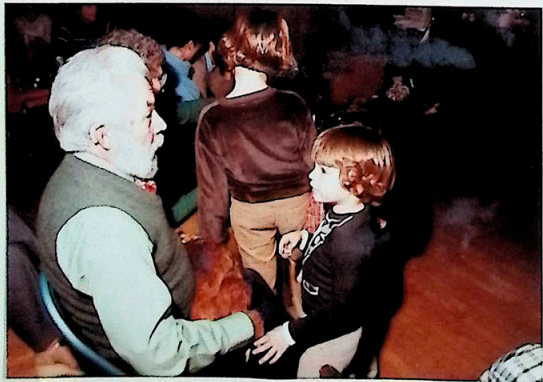
Brel continues in its cabaret-style theater seating 8:30 p.m. today and Saturday and Feb. 11 and 12 at the IDES Hall, 140 W. J St.

Tickets, \$5.50 in advance and \$6.50 at the door, are available by calling 746-1285.

Diane Mann 2/4/83

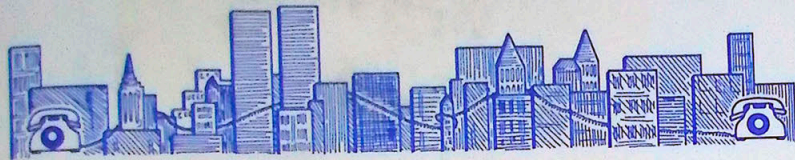


CHRISTMAS PARTY - 1981



SPRING - 1982

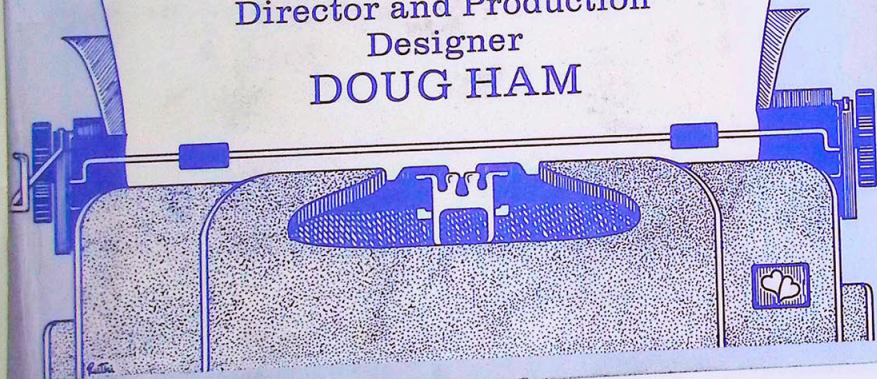
CHAPTER TWO



The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group
presents
Neil Simon's

chapter two

Director and Production
Designer
DOUG HAM



'Chapter' touches despite errors

By MAGGI ROSTER
Special to the Times Herald

BENICIA — Neil Simon's semi-autobiographical, bitter-sweet comedy "Chapter Two" is the spring production currently produced by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group at the IDES Hall here.

The play tells of two people's readjustment to society in general, and specifically to the "single life" after being faced with the death of one spouse and the divorce of the other.

Widower-writer George Schneider meets divorcee-actress Jenny Malone accidentally on purpose after some hysterical previous "blind dates" arranged by his brother Leo and her friend, Faye. The rest of the story falls nicely into place, Simon-style, but not without some real soul-searching and poignancy.

Production designer and director Doug Ham had a difficult task in moving his Point Richmond Masquers production from an intimate theater setting to the barn-like atmosphere of the IDES Hall. His dual set of two back-to-back apartments is clever and workable if somewhat cluttered.

There was too much unnecessary furniture for such a neat and tidy script. Basically, Ham's direction captured the very essence of what is superbly Simon — fast-paced action, clipped dialogue and multi-faceted characterizations, but there were some glaring movement errors which cannot help but be noted.

In the two most serious parts

of the production, the movement became static and was distracting. When Jenny feels her new life with George is being threatened, her confrontation is a poignant and "center stage" moment. Instead she (a diminutive person to begin with) is set upstage, profile to the audience, facing the lowering image of George and our focus is shifted to him, when the emphasis should really be on her.

Where the scene should bring the audience to emotional empathy, we are left straining to hear and truly comprehend what is being said.

Another awkward moment comes when George tells his brother Leo of his plans to marry Jenny. Both men are seated, and in Leo's preoccupation with his own problems, he faces the downstage left wall and floor in an effort not to appear interested in what George is saying. The entire process is flat and distracts from the action at hand.

The intimate cast of four interacts well with one another. Danny Clark as George provides just the right amount of clarity, comedic timing and vulnerability to make his character believable. I did find myself wanting more in his serious moments, however, as some of his more emotional scenes appeared wooden and stiff.

As Jenny, Roberta Wells-Famula was a natural, and we felt an immediate understanding of her struggles as a new divorcee. We also totally believed her devotion to this new man in her life. Her scenes with each of the other characters were well defined, rich

and warm. Her interaction with George made us forget the incredible difference in their heights, even though she belies the problems of her last blind date who she terms a "6 foot 8 inch giant."

As Faye, Jenny's friend, Michelle Webber made for some brilliant comic relief. She seemed to possess a naturally affinity with a New Yorker's neurosis and near mid-life crisis. Her exit lines almost always ended in audience cheers and laughter.

As George's brother Leo, Tim Outman was at his peak in his confrontation scene with Jenny. His monologue describing George's grief at the death of his first wife was touching and emotional. His scenes with George were more stilted and awkward and his voice was more monotone in his earlier scenes.

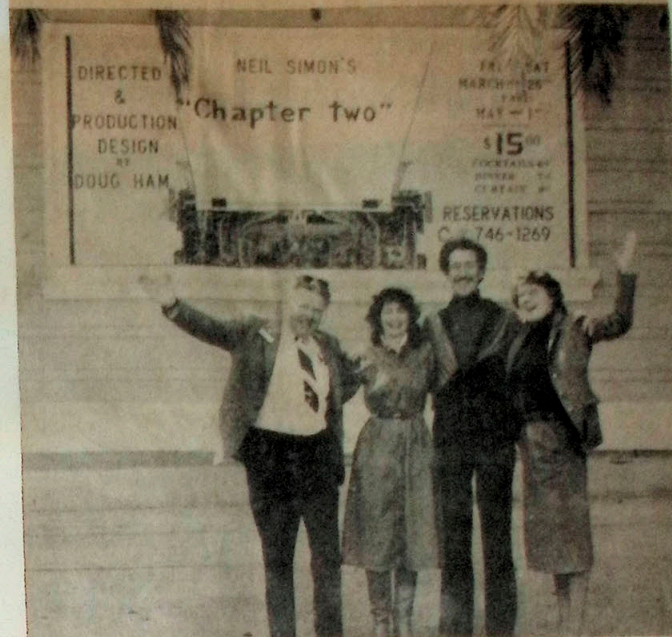
As the action progressed, so did he, and his seduction scenes with Faye were appropriately entertaining. As a first time performer he shows promise and displays a truthful quality.

"Chapter Two" is an appropriate springtime show, since its basic theme is spring-oriented — rebirth — beginning again. It is touching and funny and Saturday evenings through May 1. It is a dinner theater with no-host cocktails beginning at 6:30 p.m., an appetizing dinner at 7:15 p.m. and curtain at 8:30 p.m.

Tickets are \$15 and are available at Munter Music in Vallejo and A. Star Co. in Benicia or by calling 746-1269.

Times Herald 3/24/82

Another opening ... another show!



This Friday evening, March 26, the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of Neil Simon's "Chapter Two" will open in Benicia. To celebrate their new membership in the Chamber of Commerce, BOTTG will sponsor the first ever "Chamber Night" at the theater. Chamber rep John Woods (left) and Pat Schroeder (right) welcome BOTTG President Lesiya Asera and Board of Directors member Kevin McCall in true thespian style, and remind Chamber members to reserve their tickets for the dinner theater by calling 746-1269. *(Jim Herald)* 3/24/82

'Chapter Two' Uses Tried-True Formula

By BOB LAWSON

Neil Simon's "Chapter Two," which opened a six-weekend run last Friday night at the Benicia Old Town Theatre, is likely to fare well at the box office. After all it's a Simon play.

It is performed adequately by a cast of four who put reasonable amount of vitality into this production.

Nonetheless, the spring BOTTG show—substituted for the originally-scheduled musical "Mack and Mabel"—comes off as a rather ordinary effort.

Simon's characters have been overcoming their self-centered nature amidst a flood of witty one-liners about New York and the contents of their refrigerators since "Come Blow Your Horn" in the early 1960s. Frankly, I'm getting bored with it all.

We find no fault with the Benicia players in this production, however. Three of the four—Danny Clark, Roberta Wells-Famula, and Tim Outman—are fresh off a run with "Chapter Two" in Point Richmond, which was directed then and now by Doug Ham. Joining the cast is

Michelle Webber.

Veteran Clark performs creditably as the recently-widowed George, as does Wells-Famula as newly-divorced Jennie. Both are up to the challenge of the transition from Simon's urbane one-liners that fill the first half of the show to the paths of the closing scenes.

Outman, in his first show, occasionally displays a lack of seasoning, but generally comes across well. Webber is very pleasing and hilarious as Jennie's friend in a role that, unlike the other three, is straight comedy from start to finish.

Director Ham has crowded two apartments onto a single-stage set and not even a superior lighting job can completely suspend the feeling that this comedy is actually being played out on the floor of a discount furniture store.

After last year's smashing "Company," smashes had been looking we hard to BOTTG's forward musical effort, next won't be until next which, when "Cabaret" is sprinal.

The tried-and-true presentation of "Chapter Two" should keep BOTTG from taking a bath this year—audiences

are likely to find it somewhere in the realm of satisfactory or even a cut above—but it will not go down as a giant.

Reservations are required at least one day in advance and may be made by telephoning 746-1269; tickets are also available at Munter Music in Vallejo and A. Star Co. in Benicia. Tickets are \$15 each.

No-host cocktails begin at 6:30 p.m., followed by dinner (the Washington House's chicken breast rates as fair, the dessert caramel custard as quite good) at 7:15, and the show at 8:30.



Roberta Famula Wells and Danny Clark star in the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of "Chapter Two," opening tonight in Benicia.

16—Vallejo Independent Press, Friday, Oct.



Frankster Christopher Wren (Ray Fraga) succeeds in starting the very proper Mrs. Boyle (Marie Wedell) in this scene from the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group production of Agatha Christie's "The Mousetrap," playing weekends through Nov. 21 at the Benicia IDES Hall, 140 West J St. Reservations are required and may be made by telephoning 746-1269. Tickets for the dinner-theatre show are \$15 per person.

'Mousetrap' Wears Well

By BOB LAWSON

Who was the murderer? Was it Giles Ralston, the guesthouse host? Or was it his wife, Mollie? Could it have been zany lad Christopher Wren, who busies around the place dressed like a Christmas present? Or the stuffy retired major? How about the mannish, moody Miss Casewell or the demanding Mrs. Boyle? Or that strange Mr. Paravicini, who just "happened" to be stranded in the neighborhood and wears rouge on his cheeks.

You'll never read the answer here, to be sure.

If you had been in London during the past 29 years, you could have learned the murderer's identity by seeing "The Mousetrap." Agatha Christie's mystery thriller that holds the record for longevity on the British stage.

Of course, you don't have to travel to Britain to unravel the mystery. It's only a few miles down the freeway to the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of "The Mousetrap," which opened a six-weekend run last Friday night at the Benicia IDES Hall.

The dinner theatre production will continue Fridays and Saturdays through Nov. 21. Cocktails begin at 6:30 p.m. with dinner at 7:15 and the show at 8:30. Tickets are \$15 each and advance reservations (required) may be made by telephoning 746-1629.

Dame Christie has assembled seven possible suspects and victims in a manor house hostelry, snowed them in, and lets us wait for the murderer to strike. It's a good evening's entertainment.

The BOTTG players handle the task well in just about all respects, save for the problem of balancing their English accents. Stan Ford, who plays manor owner Giles Ralston, comes off sounding too much like Cary Grant, while Don Fitzgerald, playing Major Metcalf, never quite becomes the huffy, bully and all-that-rot type of character one has come to expect of the retired British officer.

Dan Clark, of course, has it easy in the role of stranded stranger Paravicini: Italian accents are easier than British.

Fine performances are offered by Claudia Yuhas, in the role of Mollie Ralston, the lady

of the house, and Ray Fraga, the flighty, foppish Christopher Wren. Marie Wedell is well-cast as the retired magistrate, Mrs. Boyle, and Georgia Taylor Benedict gives a moving portrayal of Miss Casewell, the troubled expatriate.

An excellent performance is given by 19-year-old Scott Quintard, as the detective sergeant who arrives through the snow drifts to warn the marooned guests of their danger and seeks to sniff out the murderer.

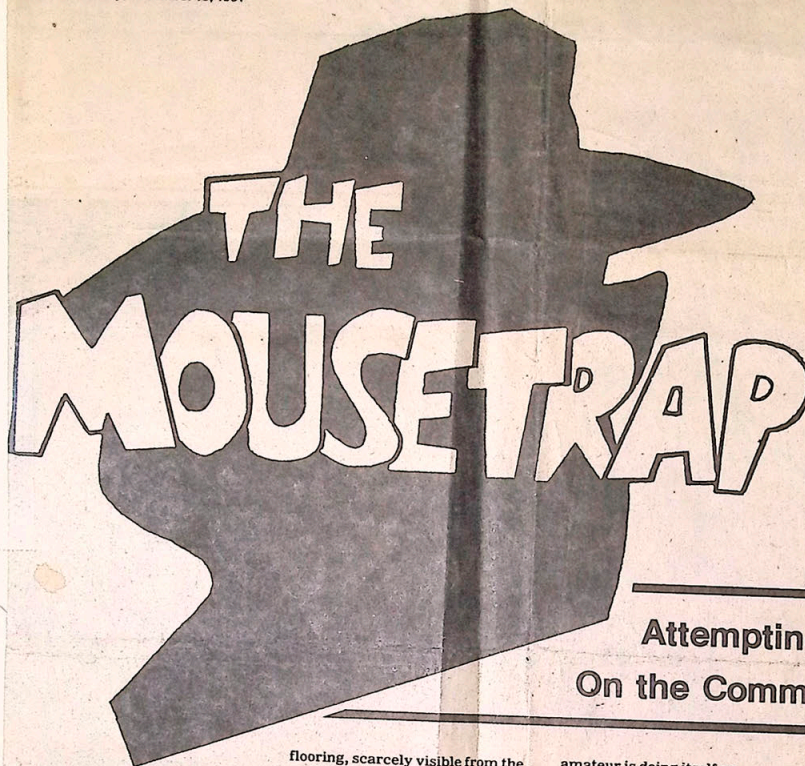
The play is co-directed by Linda Barron and Doug Ham, and Ham designed the impressive manor house set, a fine piece of work that made me want to make my own week's reservation at Monkswell Manor.

The play, of course, is just the "post gusta" of the experience of attending Benicia Old Town Theatre Group, where invariably the patrons enjoy themselves thoroughly from the time the doors are opened until the last curtain call.

The repeat time around is billed as British fare, and hearty fare it is. The Cornish pastie catered by Benicia's Washington House is both hearty and delicious, served with a fine salad, delicately cooked parley potatoes and carrots, and the light berry dessert "Grosset fool." And, to insure that no one has to do their sleuthing from the audience on a less-than-full stomach, they served two large rolls.

Volunteer bartenders filled in well opening night — there was some sort of mix-up in the arrangements — but were up to the task of meeting patron demands for cocktails, wine, and the between-acts dessert drinks.

2A Reporter • Vacaville, California
Sunday, November 15, 1981



By JOHN FRANK

Reporter Theater Reviewer
The set for the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of "The Mousetrap" is a wonder. The room is actually wooden, stem to stern. There are English cigarettes on the table. The

English couple about an hour's train ride outside London. There's been a murder in London, the odd assortment of weekend guests learn as they arrive in a blinding snowstorm.

A Scotland Yard detective arrives on skis to warn proprietors and guests alike of the rancorous slaying and that one or more of them may be next.

Act One concludes with the

flooring, scarcely visible from the audience, is painted to resemble hardwood. And, yes, there is snow falling outside the set's front window.

Doug Ham, director and set designer for the show, feels that the attention to minute detail is only a symptom of the disease afflicting the Benicia group — professionalism.

"Any group that calls itself

amateur is doing itself an injustice," Ham said. "Whether your audience is paying \$5 or \$15, they're entitled to the best work you can do."

It seems to work. BOTTG's spring musical, "Company," received sterling reviews throughout the area. Their current rendition of the Agatha Christie classic is meeting with similar success.

"This is the only successful northern California dinner theater," Ham commented. "The community support here has a lot to do with it."

Dan Clark, who has worked with the group since 1971, believes that the relaxed atmosphere attracts enough new talent to prevent politics from interfering with productivity.

"We don't have a core group of actors who appear in every show," Clark explained. "A lot of theater groups become insular — the same people doing the same thing over and over again."

"As a matter of fact," he continued, "it's very seldom you'll see the same face in successive shows, here."

Clark agrees with Ham that community support makes a lot of difference. Apparently all one has to do is mention a show within anyone's and volunteers are lining up out of the woodwork.

"Theater groups, the core of actors," he said. "The formance of actors," he said. "The

widow, Miss Casewell, played by Georgia Taylor Benedict, is fairly convincing as the mannish young woman with a European address.

Dan Clark who plays Mr. Paravicini moves well on stage but his makeup was grotesque, making him look more like Dracula than an aging Italian gentleman. Don Fitzgerald plays a staid, distinguished Major Metcalf.

The English accents affected by the lot were just good enough. The interior of Monkswell Manor was nicely thought out by set designer and co-director Doug Ham. But it would have been nice if an impression of the stormy weather outside had been generated when the windows were opened.

If the pace of the play and some

core of this group is made out of workers."

The company's production of "The Mousetrap" is indicative of yet another eccentricity — that being the choice of material. Who in their right mind would attempt a mystery on the community stage?

"We like doing unusual shows," Ham said, "not so many tacky, tired, tired musicals. Some of them are so overdone."

"Our next show, for example, is 'Mack and Mabel.' That's the life of Mack Sennett, the comedy silent film director who invented the Keystone Cops. And it's the worst coast premiere."

Not a first. The Benicia group was the first community theater in the country to do "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest." At this writing, they're after first rights to "The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas."

Company actress Georgia Taylor Benedict feels that the group attitude is just a little more intense than that of some other organizations. "You really have to decide whether it's serious work or whether it's a party," she said. "If a person is devoting the time to be in a show, he shouldn't have to worry about other people showing for rehearsals."

Benedict, like others in the group, credits phenomenal public support with much of the BOTTG's base strength.

The current production plays at IDES hall, 140 West J St. in Benicia through Saturday, Nov. 21.

Information regarding the dinner theater may be obtained by telephoning (707) 746-1269.

Reservations are necessary.



Three likely suspects in the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group production of the Agatha Christie murder mystery "The Mousetrap" include Major Metcalf, (Don Paravicini) (Dan Clark), and G (Ford).



Three likely suspects in the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group production of the Agatha Christie murder mystery "The Mousetrap" include Major Metcalf, (Don Paravicini) (Dan Clark), and G (Ford).

Attempting a Mystery On the Community Stage



Doug Ham, director and designer of "Mousetrap"....the man with the right mind to attempt a mystery on the community stage.

IDES hall, 140 West J St. in Benicia through Saturday, Nov. 21. Information regarding the dinner theater may be obtained by telephoning (707) 746-1269.



Scott Quintard and Georgia Taylor Benedict

'Mousetrap' does review

By LAURA R. THOMAS
Times-Herald Panorama editor

BENICIA — Lovers of Agatha Christie mystery's expect a very suspenseful who-dun-it when they see a play based on one of the detective novelist's works.

But the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's opening dramatization of "The Mousetrap" Friday night was too plodding to keep the attention of several theatergoers.

It was a long wait for Mrs. Boyle's murder late in the first act and the murder investigation in the second act was slow. What suspense was created in the first act seemed to wane midway through Act II as Detective Sgt. Trotter, played by Scott Alan Quintard, attempts to glean information from the suspects. The action picks up briefly right before the capitulation of the play when the murderer's identity is revealed, but that was it.

Based on "Three Blind Mice," a 30-minute radio play Christie wrote for Queen Mary's 50th birthday, the play has run for nearly 39 years in

London, making it the longest-running English-speaking play in history.

The story centers on the presence of a murderer and a likely victim among the guests and proprietors of a snowbound rural guest house, Monkswell Manor. Trotter manages to arrive by skis to alert the occupants that one of their number is suspected of the venetia slaying of a London woman and intends to find more victims within the house.

Nearly all the characters are strangers to one another. Even Giles and Mollie Ralston, the young couple who have just opened the manor to guests, find themselves suspecting each other as the play progresses.

Some of the characters are well drawn and acted, others fall flat. Claudia Yuhas who plays Mollie Ralston has a certain amount of presence and ability. Stan Ford,

about town

People and events

Who done it? / A polished, professional classic

by Mary Ellen Carroll
"Mum's" the word — I will honor the request to keep the secret of Agatha Christie's "The Mousetrap" which opened last Friday, Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's fall production. I won't tell who done it.

Of course this makes the job of reviewing the play difficult! It's generally customary to give a short run-through of the action of the play and within that framework, comment on the performances, direction and other qualities of the experience.

No one said to keep the ap-

the feeling of the "fourth wall" extremely well, giving the audience the proper feeling for viewing a mystery.

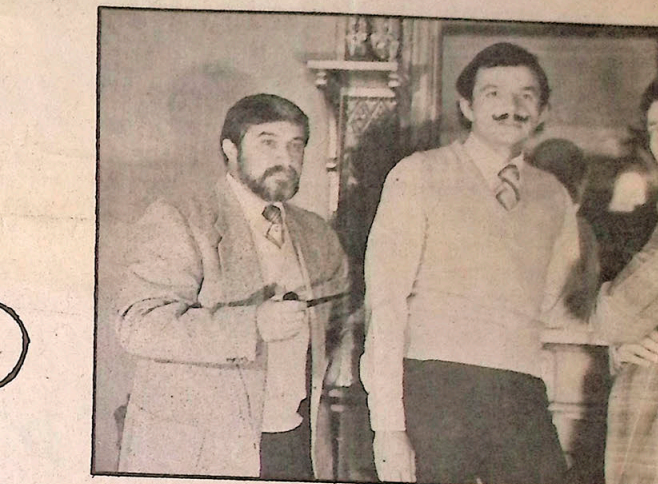
All of the actors and actresses turned in good performances — especially good were Claudia Keppel Yuhas, Stan Ford and Georgia Taylor Benedict — their demeanor remained consistently British throughout the play. Marie Wedell was also exceptional and Dan Clark was delightfully Italian. Don Fitzgerald, Ray Praga and Scott Quintard were all very good although their problems with the British accents were somewhat distract-

thday and then adapted for the stage, opened in November of 1952. It had a successful run of 8,862 performances, moseyed down the road to a larger theatre in March 1974, played until August 21, 1975, setting a Guinness Record of the longest continuous run of any show in the world.

Directors Linda Barron and Doug Ham have done a remarkable job in presenting this classic. It has a polished, professional look, the set design by Ham is of the quality one enjoys at A.C.T. productions and costumes by Carol Berman are perfectly suited to the play and the characters.



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Doug Ham, director and designer of "Mousetrap"....the man with the right mind to attempt a mystery on the community stage.

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Scott Quintard and Georgia Taylor Benedict

Benicia Herald Jan 12, 1982
For Wally and Mickey Hunt

Benicia's first 'wedding bee'

By Kevin McCall
The song 'Dear Hearts and Gentle People' comes to mind as I write this story about a 'wedding bee' which took place in Our Town, Benicia.

This writer's number one foster son, Wally Hunt, decided he was in love and wanted to be married. His intended, Mickey, is a lovely young lady here on a visitor's visa from British Columbia, Canada.

Consternation! Wally had no job, no money and no real positive future - but love is blind and youth thinks love conquers all.

In Wally's case, this could be true because their mutual love seemed to be contagious, for in no time a 'wedding bee' began.

Wally invited his fellow Benicia Old Town Theatre Group members to the initially meager ceremony they had planned.

A flurry of activity was initiated in town, and within two weeks invitations (designed gratis by a local artist), printed (gratis by a local BOTTG member) were in the mail.

The big day arrived and 40 to 60 guests came bearing gifts and food for the wedding potluck.

A beautiful ceremony was performed by the minister with excerpts from Gibran's 'The Prophet'.

The bride wore a beautiful white antique



Benicia's first 'wedding bee' honored Wally and Mickey Hunt.

wedding gown (happily loaned). The groom, in a brushed brown velvet suit (also loaned) nervously recited vows while the best man, bridesmaid and attendants (a Saint Bernard and Doberman adorned with garlands of flowers) participated reverently.

After the ceremony, the revelry began with champagne

toasting, dining and dancing to two live bands who donated their services.

The couple left on an unexpected honeymoon because of the generosity of their friends and guests from the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group.

Yes - a 'wedding bee' took place in Our Town.

A memorable experience took place not only for a bride and groom, but for every individual involved.

Best wishes go to Wally and Mickey Hunt.

Blessings on all who participated.

Congratulations to the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group for their most spontaneous and giving performance.



Editor:

I recently met, fell in love and was married in your beautiful town.

I entered your country only to visit, but came back to Canada with a loving husband, many dreams and very fond and overwhelming impressions of a very special town and its residents.

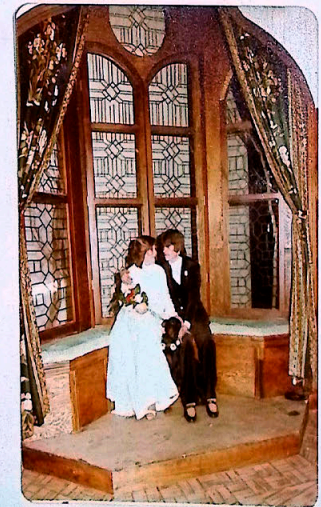
I was a stranger and yet when my betrothed introduced me to his friends and the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group I was welcomed at once with the most sincere, interested and loving gestures.

My wedding was the most precious gift I have ever received - For it was a gift from a group that obviously personifies the town.

Thank you so very much as I reach across a border and touch with love my 'In-Laws' which happen to be a special giving town and group.

Mrs. Wally Hunt
nee Mickey Servatius
British Columbia, Canada

Benicia Herald
Jan. 15, 1982





It's Friday

Benicia Herald, Friday, March 20, 1981



Benician Dan Johnson (left) stars as Robert with Fred Franklin and Ann Taylor in the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group production of "Company."



Red Levine Fred Franklin Scott Strohmayer
Wayne Sutton Dan Johnson



Yvonne Campbell Nancy Gill Nori Hesse

'Company:' A Polished Musical

By JOHN FRANK
Reporter/Editor/Reviewer
Community theater, this ain't.
It's supposed to be. The Benicia
Old Town Theatre Group professes
amateur status, but who's kidding
who? Their spring musical,
Stephen Sondheim's "Company,"
is a knockout in any category.
"Company" is an ensemble production of short vignettes with the
common theme of marriage. The
unmarried hero, Robert, is the
favored-upon favorite of his
numerous married friends. They
invite him for dinners, try to fix
him up with nice girls and worry
over him constantly.
Robert thinks he wants to get
married, but can't really come up
with a good reason. The sequences
that lead to this ultimate
understanding of why people
marry are hilarious and touching.
And occasionally painful.
Top marks go to director Dennis
Kohles, who also choreographed

the show. Kohles has done several
noteworthy things, here. His
casting is unusually spot on; the
characters look perfect, before
they've uttered a syllable.

Kohles has everyone on stage
standing in the right place at the
right time. His fine use of freezes
and careful blocking keep the show
flowing effortlessly. The hand of
the director is evident throughout,
and a steady hand it is.

Dan Johnson's moving portrayal
of Robert acts as the show's binding
element. He has his stiff
moments, but is fine overall and
sings a beautiful tenor. Johnson's
climatic performance of "Being
Alive" is truly heartrending.

The ensemble is full of sparklers.
There isn't a weak showing in the
lot, but some players stand out
particularly. Ann Taylor, as Sarah, is
a marvelous comedienne with a
priceless repertoire of facial
expressions. Taylor's opening scene
with her husband, Harry (Fred
Franklin) is a riot. Taylor and
Franklin find themselves squaring
off for a karate match, as Taylor
shouts such epithets as "Sashimi!"
and "Teriaki!" Corny, but it
works.

As Amy, Linda Barron's
portrayal of a girl who gets cold feet
on her wedding day is one of the
evening's best. Her frantic delivery of
"Getting Married Today" is
superb.

There are other outstanding
performers; in fact, there are nothing
but outstanding performers. "Nuff
said."

Doug Ham's technical work here
is tight, smooth and occasionally
stunning. Especially impressive is
a dance sequence complete with
flashing running lights and a
strobe. Ham also designed the
impressionistic, tiered set.

Excellent musical accompaniment
is provided by a three-piece
band directed by the pianist, Karl
Francis Pistor. The musicians are
accomplished and never commit
the unpardonable sin of overpowering
the vocalists.

See this show. Musically,
technically, and dramatically it is
without peer in recent area
theater. The show includes a seven-
course meal, and reservations (re-
quired) are available at (707) 746-



The men of Benicia Old Town Theatre's "Company," (from left) Red Levine, Fred Franklin, Scott Strohmayer, Wayne Sutton and Dan Johnson gather for a song.

1269. "Company" plays at 140 West J St., Benicia, weekends through May 2.

Contra Costa Times - April 17, 1981

Weekly Winners

Theater

Ah, what a show! The Benicia Old Town Theater Group's razzle-dazzle production of Stephen Sondheim's bitter-sweet musical *Company*, under the direction of Contra Costans Dennis Kohles and Karl Pistor, is playing to overflow houses at the IDES Hall on West J Street in downtown Benicia. Audiences are blown away by the consistently high level of the performances, the excellent voices, the untiring energy, the professionalism and polish of the 14 cast members who work together so smoothly that they do indeed deserve to be called a "company." Now for the bad news. Tickets for the dinner/theater combo on Friday and Saturday evenings are completely sold out. But you may be able to get seats for the show alone, starting at 8:30. In response to overwhelming demand, extra performances have been scheduled for May 8 and 9. For ticket information, phone (707) 746-1269. — Maggie Crum

Oakland Tribune
Apr. 30, 1981



HELD OVER — Stars (from left) Thomas Baptist, Red Levine and Dan Johnson are being held over May 8 and 9 in the Benicia Old Town Group's dinner-theater production of the musical "Company." Seats alone may be obtained by calling 707-746-1269. The scheduled run of performances will be completed tomorrow night.

Richmond
Independent
Gazette
4-10-81



On the town Joel Gordiejew

It's just a little more than a week away from Easter and a good suggestion to make reservations or at least a choice of restaurant for that day.

Besides Mother's Day, Easter is usually one of the busier days of the year for the restaurant trade. I suggest if you have any questions regarding menu or time, to call the restaurant and get all the information. They'll be more than happy to help. But as I mentioned — do it early.

I had the opportunity to attend The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's latest production, "Company," a few weeks ago and must admit that they definitely have a hit on their hands.

Now before anyone asks why this guy is writing about a play out in Benicia, let me explain. BOTTG is a dinner theatre and by handling a dining page I found it appropriate to combine the two by dining out and enjoying one of the finest musical-comedies in a long time.


I won't deal with the critical aspects of the play, because I don't possess that criteria, but I will say that I thoroughly enjoyed both the food and the presentation.

The play is well paced, music above average, actors entertaining and the storyline brings back quite a few good memories.

If you're looking for an entertaining night out, to include dinner and an array of libations, I encourage you to attend this show.

There are a few dates that are still open and more information may be obtained by calling 746-1269. "Company" runs through May 2.

Bake 15 minutes at 350 degrees or 30 minutes at 350 degrees to nicely brown.



Sir Toby Belch
Grandly Announces
the
Presentation of
w. shakespeare's
Bawdy and Racy
Twelfth Night

by the
Benicia Old Town Dinner Theatre Group
Directed by David C. Roster
Opening Fri. & Sat. Nights, Oct. 24 & 25
and continuing for an additional five weekends
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at the IDES Hall, 140 West "J" Street, Benicia
★ No Host Cocktails, 6:30 P.M. ★ Dinner, 7:15 P.M. ★ Curtain, 8:30 P.M.
Dinner and Theatre \$13.00

For Reservations: (707) 746-1269
or write BOTTG, P.O. Box 602, Benicia, Calif. 94510

Tickets also available at
Winters & Winters Law Offices in Benicia
and A. Star Co., 714 First Street, Benicia

City of Benicia

"Historic Benicia Alert to the Future"

Proclamation

BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE GROUP MONTH
NOVEMBER 1980

WHEREAS: The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group was founded in 1964 as an offshoot of the Benicia Old Town Group, and

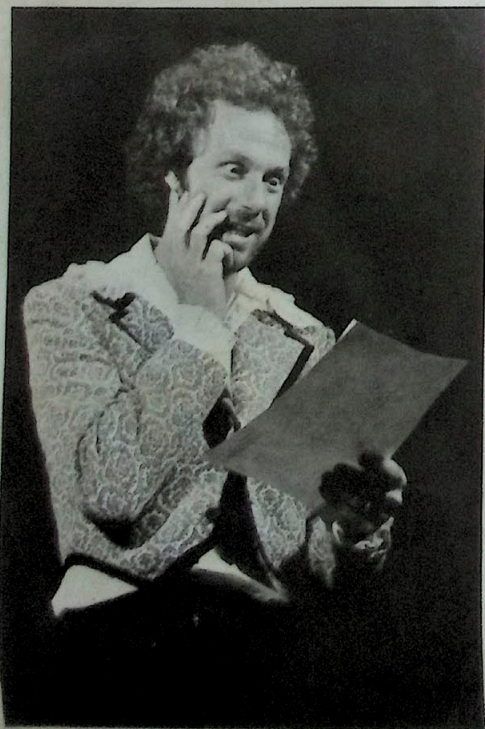
WHEREAS: With the generous cooperation of the Benicia IDES Hall Committee and with contributions of services, material, and money by members of the community, the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group has maintained the oldest dinner theatre in the Bay Area for the last sixteen (16) years, and

WHEREAS: By mounting two dinner theatre productions a year, the Group has made their audiences laugh with "See How They Run", cry with "Our Town", and think with "Little Murders". It has sent its audiences away humming with "Anything Goes", "Once Upon a Mattress", and "Sugar", to name a few of the twenty eight (28) plays the Group has produced. In addition, the Group has cosponsored a Christmas production of the "Nutcracker" ballet for the delight of Benicia children. The Group opens October 24th with its first Shakespearean play, "Twelfth Night".

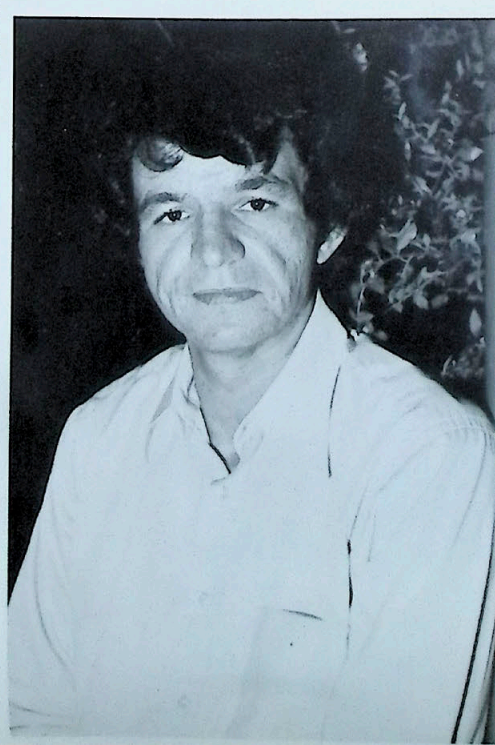
NOW THEREFORE, with admiration for the accomplishment of the BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE GROUP, I, Warren R. O'Brien, Mayor of the City of Benicia, do hereby proclaim the month of November 1980, as BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE GROUP MONTH.

September 23, 1980
DATE

Warren R. O'Brien
MAYOR



Jim Henson



Danny Clark



Valeria Ann Caldwell Jeffrey Robinson

SPRING - 1981

COMPANY

The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group

presents

COMPANY

Music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim

Book by George Furth

Director

DENNIS KOHLES

Musical Director

KARL FRANCIS PISTER

Technical Director and Set Design

DOUG HAM



The Pleasure of Their 'Company'

By MAGGIE CRUM
About 10 days ago I had an interview with director Dennis Kohles and music director Karl Francis Pister, who have been enticed across the Benicia Bridge to direct the Benicia Old Town Theater Group's production of *Company*, with music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, which opened Friday night.

Ten days ago, mind you, Dennis and Karl told me the show was "so good that it could be opening in San Francisco." I thought they might have been exaggerating — just a tiny bit — but they were absolutely correct.

The 14 cast members have given the show everything they've got — and then some — and the result is a superb evening of theater. The opening night audience was blown away by the consistently high level of the performance, by the excellent voices, the unflagging energy, the professionalism and the polish of the cast members, who work together so smoothly that they do indeed deserve to be called a "company."

The dinner theater show is being presented Friday and Saturday evenings through May 2 at the IDES Hall on West J Street. No-host cocktails at 6:30 are followed by a candlelight dinner at 7:15, and curtain time is at 8:30. Price for dinner and the show is \$13.50, and tickets (which I'm sure will soon be sold out) may be reserved by phoning (707) 746-1269. It is also possible to skip the dinner and get tickets just for the performance.

Company is the story of Bobby, a playboy whose best friends are five married couples, all of whom are caught up in the anguish and, occasionally, the joys of togetherness. Bobby is the popular bachelor, the life of the party, the would-be lover of wayward wives and the con-



Patrick Payton, Thelma Baptist (background), Ann Taylor and Dan Johnson (foreground) are featured in the Benicia Old Town Theater Group's highly successful production of Stephen Sondheim's *Company*.

stant target of matchmakers. He also has three girls (safety in numbers), who are tired of waiting around for him. And as he comes to grips with his 35th birthday, Bobby is terrified by the realization that he must change his way of life. If there's a moral to the story, it would seem to be that it's better to be together than alone — even though the relationship may just about drive you crazy.

Handsome Dan Johnson uses his ingenuous charm and pleasing voice in playing Bobby, and it is easy to see why his married friends — as well as his three girlfriends — are devoted to him. Johnson couldn't be more likable in the role.

The five couples are

played by 10 beautifully cast performers. Ann Taylor (a true comic) and Fred Franklin work off their antagonisms (guzzling and gluttony) as they use their skills in karate to hit each other below the belt literally and figuratively in a wildly funny scene. Deborah Casey as the delicate southern belle, Susan, and Wayne Sutton as Peter are dependent on each other but happier divorced than wed.

Marilyn Schonberg and Patrick Payton, as Jenny and David, will try anything for new thrills and they are a great hit in their "stoned" scene. Linda Barron excels in the classic song "Getting Married Today," portraying Amy, who panics on the

way to the altar to marry the flabbergasted Paul (Scott J. Strohmayer), with whom she's lived happily for years.

Silver-haired Thelma Baptist gives a vibrant and electric performance as Joanne — thrice married, wickedly cynical — and she is most effective as she sings "Ladies Who Lunch." Her partner in this marriage of convenience is Larry, smoothly played by Red Levine.

The three girls who'd like to catch Bobby are pretty and vivid April, played by Nori Hess, who sings the plaintive and funny "Barcelona"; streetwise Marta, played by Yvonne Campbell, who also does a dazzling dance; and Kathy, portrayed by Nancy Gill, who conquers

that most difficult of songs, "Hundred Pounds of Beauty." Doug Ham, black and silver, is a sleek and sassy dancer. He uses five varying heights of cubism and promisingly suggests the prisons in which couples become. The sets are as dramatic as a drag ground for the choreographer as well as ensemble. Dennis Kohles, Pister, who play and accom throughout (9 bounce as he boards), desertors for their w party. Don't miss

April 15, 1981 Benicia - Time Herald

Successful show holds over 'Company' adds two more dates

'Company' is being held over! The current dinner-theatre production by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group has met with such success that BOTTG has decided to extend for an additional weekend.

"Since we are the Benicia community theatre group, we wanted to make sure that everyone in town that wishes to see the show will have the opportunity to do so," said club president Red Levine.

The show opened to rave reviews on April 3, and is now sold out for its remaining weekend performances through May 2. The two additional shows, on May 8 and 9, will not feature the dinner, but will have a no-host bar available. Tickets are \$5 and reservations are necessary by calling 746-1269.

Table seating will be according to reservation date, with earlier ticket holders being seated toward the front of the 140 West J St. theatre. Doors will open at 7:30 with an 8:30 curtain both nights.

"Since the hall only has seating for about 250 people, anyone who wishes to see the show should make reservations as soon as possible," notes Levine.

'Company' is the musical story of a 35-year-old bachelor named Bobby, whose best friends are five married couples. Aided by these friends and his three girlfriends, Bobby decides it is time to consider changing his lifestyle. Through a series of short vignettes, the show is a sometimes funny, sometimes touching look at why people marry.

Directed and choreographed by Dennis Kohles, with musical direction by Karl Francis Pister, 'Company' features several talented Benicia residents. The lead role of Bobby is played by Dan Johnson, Benicia school district music teacher. Middle School music instructor Debra Casey can be seen as Susan. Professional actress and past BOTTG president Linda Barron has the part of Amy, and Thelma Baptist, a newcomer to theater, is Joanne.



Dan Johnson, as Bobby, hears advice from his married friends, Fred Franklin, Scott Strohmayer and Wayne Sutton. BOTTG production of 'Company' being held over May 8 and 9.



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NOVEMBER 1980

WHEREAS: The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group was founded in 1964 as an offshoot of the Benicia Old Town Group, and

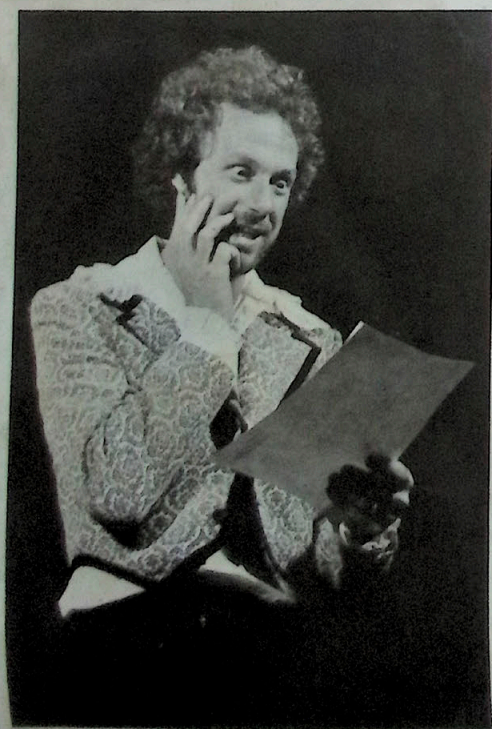
WHEREAS: With the generous cooperation of the Benicia IDES Hall Committee and with contributions of services, material, and money by members of the community, the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group has maintained the oldest dinner theatre in the Bay Area for the last sixteen (16) years, and

WHEREAS: By mounting two dinner theatre productions a year, the Group has made their audiences laugh with "See How They Run", cry with "Our Town", and think with "Little Murders". It has sent its audiences away humming with "Anything Goes", "Once Upon a Mattress", and "Sugar", to name a few of the twenty eight (28) plays the Group has produced. In addition, the Group has cosponsored a Christmas production of the "Nutcracker" ballet for the delight of Benicia children. The Group opens October 24th with its first Shakespearean play, "Twelfth Night".

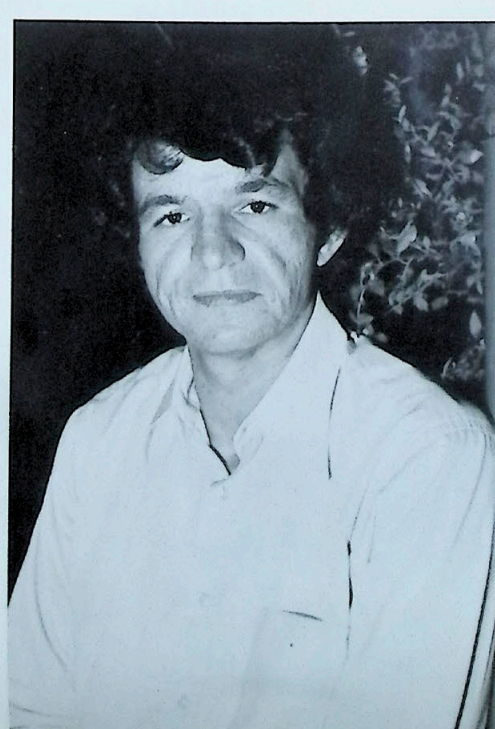
NOW THEREFORE, with admiration for the accomplishment of the BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE GROUP, I, Warren R. O'Brien, Mayor of the City of Benicia, do hereby proclaim the month of November 1980, as BENICIA OLD TOWN THEATRE GROUP MONTH.

September 23, 1980
DATE

Warren R. O'Brien
MAYOR



Jim Hinton



Danny Clark



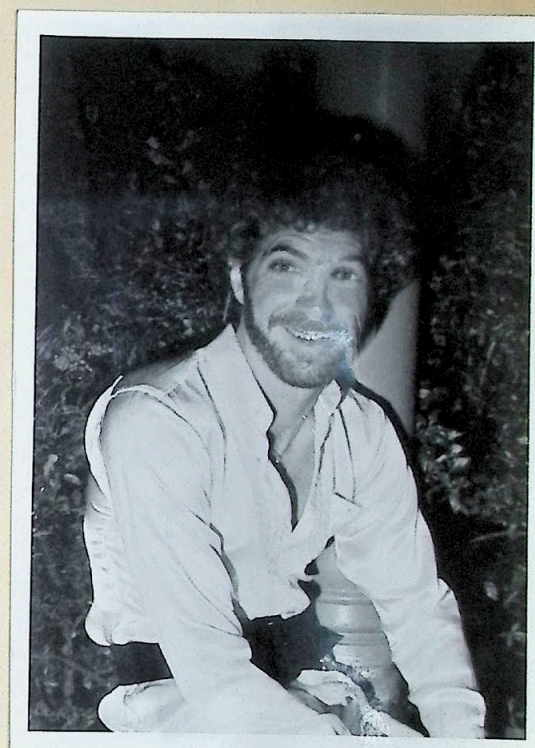
Valeria Ann Caldwell Jeffrey Robinson



Merry Curran Jan O'Gara



Betty McFadden



Martin 'Red' Levine



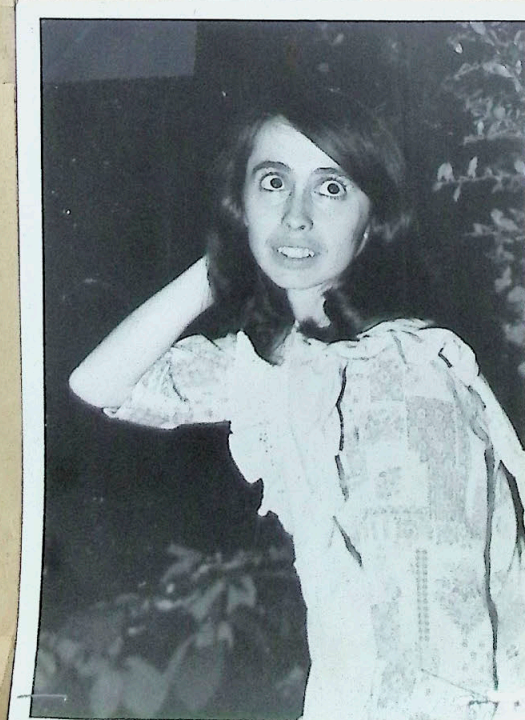
Janice Cooper



Merry Curran Jan O'Gara



Doug Ham



Doc Scott



SUGAR - SPRING 1980

The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group

Sugar

BOOK BY
PETER STONE

MUSIC BY
JULES STYNE

LYRICS BY
BOB MERRILL

BASED ON
SOME LIKE IT HOT
by
Billy Wilder and I. L. A. Diamond

Director: JOHN BAIOCCHI

Music Director KRIS HARPER • Choreographer LIZ WAY
Technical Director and Set Design DOUG HAM

Entertainment Dancing Her Way to Fame

By MAGGIE CRUM
This award cost \$10,000, said the diminutive and pretty girl standing before the microphone on the stage at the Civic Arts Theater in Walnut Creek. "That's what all my dancing lessons cost. Thanks, Mom."

The speaker was Elizabeth Way of Concord and she was accepting the Shelle Award for the best choreography in a regional musical during the last two years.
For area theatergoers Mum's expenditure was more than justified. Liz, who started those dancing lessons at the age of three, has been appearing in shows in Contra Costa since 1971. We've seen her kick up her heels and toes in "Carousel," "Cabaret," "Applause" and "No No Nanette." If you saw "Guns and Dolls," you'll remember the doll in the center that she brought on home down with her second spouse.
In recent years Liz has

choreographed five shows, including "Anything Goes" at Civic Arts, for which she won her Shelle. Currently she is receiving plaudits for choreographing the Benicia Old Town Theater Group's hit show "Sugar," which is completely sold



Veritable Elizabeth Way, choreographer for Benicia's hit musical "Sugar," is pictured here in a recent photo.

out for the next three weekends at the IDES Lodge in Benicia.
In this show Liz has proved not only her skill as a choreographer but as a versatile performer. On opening night Joey Bartholomew, who is well over six

feet tall, was stricken with flu. So Liz, who is all of five foot two, took his place. "No one else knew the choreography," she said. "So I went home, painted on a moustache and sideburns, tucked all my curly hair under a hat, and I went onstage."
The next weekend she replaced a girl in the chorus line, and heaven knows what where you might spot her this weekend.
Liz, who spends her days working for Chevron in Oakland, makes at least a three month commitment each time she choreographs a show. And during the seemingly endless rehearsals — four and five nights a week for almost two months — she sometimes sweats she'll never do another show. But along comes the excitement of

opening night with its glitter and applause, and soon Liz finds herself willing to undertake yet another stint in show business.
In addition, Liz spends two nights a week teaching the color guard for the Concord Blue Devils' senior majorette corps. "In August we'll go to National Competition, and if we win this year we'll have a chance to represent the United States in the first international competition in 1981."
She gives this advice to the youngster who wants to go into dancing professionally. "Go for it. But prepare at a nice young age, for once you hit 30, you're over the hill as a dancer. If you don't make it as a professional, there are always lots of community theaters looking for good dancers."

It's Friday

4-Benicia Herald, Friday, February 15, 1980

Show time for BOTTG

Calling all theatre buffs!

By Leslye Asera

It's show time again for the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group. BOTTG's spring production is the popular musical "Sugar," based on the movie "Last of the Hot Lovers."

Since BOTTG is a community theatre, new members are always welcome, especially at show time when the group is most active. "Sugar" opens March 28, so the director and cast are busy putting their part of the show together.

Group members not in the cast are also very busy, building the set under the direction of the set designer Doug Ham. BOTTG President Brian Anderson states "Anyone in the community is welcome to join us. We'll be working at the IDES Hall, 140 West J St., for the next six weekends and would be delighted to see anyone interested in theatre. There's lots to be done."

Anderson also emphasized the fact that new workers need not have any previous experience. On the job training is available.

The work parties begin each Saturday and Sunday morning at 10 and conclude at 4 in the afternoon. Some members come for the day, others can only



"Come on down", invites BOTTG President Brian Anderson and "Sugar" producer Red Levine. New faces are always welcome. Anyone interested in helping with the current production can join a weekend work party or call club secretary Joan Harris at 552-1625.

contribute a few hours. BOTTG provides lunch for its workers and a happy spirit of comradery prevails as expert set builders join with totally inexperienced volunteers to reach a common goal.

For the current production, BOTTG is also looking for someone to design and construct costumes. Seamstresses and a wardrobe mistress are also needed.

All BOTTG productions are presented in the IDES Hall as dinner theatre. The two shows a year, in the spring and fall, are not always musicals. Past shows have included serious drama as well as comedy.

The group is held together between shows with monthly newsletters and meetings. At each meeting BOTTG generously gives away two tickets to a

professional show in San Francisco, either at the American Conservatory Theatre or the Civic Light Opera. New faces are welcome at these meetings as well.

Anyone wishing more information about the group or who would like to receive the newsletter can call BOTTG secretary Joan Harris at 552-1625 or Shirley Chapman, 74 2327.

'Sugar' opens this weekend!



Obviously enthralled by this millionaire, Sugar Kane (Sue Rodin from Benicia) just melts at the smooth lines handed to her by Joe (Fred Franklin from Walnut Creek) who is really a penniless saxophone player trying to con sweet innocent Sugar into falling for him. Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's spring musical "Sugar," based on the film "Some Like It Hot," is a mixture of music, madness, and several cases of mistaken identity. The dinner theater will open with gala champagne performance tonight, March 28, and Saturday March 29, and will continue every Friday and Saturday evening through May 3. For ticket reservations (required for dinner) please phone 745-2327. Tickets may also be obtained at Munter Music Co., 801 Georgia St., Vallejo, or A. Stalco, 714 First St., Benicia.



Tadg Galleran Kristy Truelsen



Linda Barron Terry McInerney



Tadg Galleran Terry McInerney



Dennis Kohles Terry McInerney



CAST OF GIRL CRAZY



Linda Barron Dennis Kohles
The Benicia Herald, Friday, March 30, 1979

BOTTG's "Girl Crazy" / A Gershwin triumph

By Leslye Asera

The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group opened an exuberant dinner-theatre production of the Gershwin musical "Girl Crazy" last weekend. I understand the opening night performance experienced some technical difficulties, but the show I saw Saturday night went very smoothly.

Although the plot of the show leaves much to be desired, the music more than makes up for this weakness. Some of the famous musical numbers include "Bidin' My Time", "I Got Rhythm", "Embraceable You", and "Strike Up The Band".

Johnny is the story's hero, an ex-TV cowboy, transplanted to Custerville, Arizona to try his hand at real-life ranching. He is trying to win the love of Molly, the local mail person. Shadows from his past emerge, however, to break up this newly sparked romance. Sam, Johnny's former agent, wants to sign Johnny to a new Hollywood contract. Kate, a past love interest, arrives with her ex-husband and accompanist Zoli, to re-light the torch with Johnny.

Two Custerville crooks also have a go at destroying Johnny. Snake Eyes and Belle, owners of a crooked card room, frame Johnny with a murder rap to keep him from closing them down. But of course, in the end, love conquers all.

Terry McInerney comes across very

well as the handsome hero. In his first stage appearance, Mr. McInerney shows great promise dramatically as well as musically.

Kristy Turlsen, as Johnny's sweetheart Molly, brings a beautiful voice to the production as well as above average acting ability. Her tipsey rendition of "Sam and Delilah" is excellent, as are her numbers with Johnny, "Embraceable You" and "Could You Use Me".

The parts of Kate and Zoli are played by BOTTG familiars Linda Barron and Dennis Kohles. Ms. Barron has a great time with Kate, playing the clawing, "jealous female" to the hilt. Unfortunately she doesn't have the strong soulful voice necessary to do justice to her two solo numbers, "I've Got Rhythm" and "Sam and Delilah".

Dennis Kohles is absolutely delightful as Zoli, the glib, European pianist, complete with accent. His performance is crisp, clean, and very funny. He alone is as absurd as the plot, and it works!

Tadg Galleran in the part of Sam turned out to be one of the better entertainers despite a few muffled lines earlier in the show. Solo "I've Got A Crush on You" was a nice touch.

These players, along with the beat chorus and moving scenery, made for a most enjoyable evening.

Director Jim Nielsen is to be congratulated for introducing several different staging effects with good results. Chorus members gradually trickled onto the stage while dinner was still being served, to go about their business on the Custerville Grand Hotel set. A little pantomime to set the mood. The bartender, Joan Harris, had a lovely time ridding the place of crawling insects with the bottom of her shoe. And so the flea-bag environment of the hotel became evident.

The excellent barbershop quartet was presented in a spotlight, almost as an olio, in the first number "Bidin' My Time", and later during scene changes.

Technical director and set designer Doug Ham gave the stage a new dimension with a revolving set, so that the Grand Hotel and Johnny's ranch could both be realistically portrayed. BOTTG usually make do with only one set.

Although the musicians accompanying the show featured an excellent pianist, Kris Harper, the remainder of the group seemed weak, as if some of the necessary instruments were missing. I personally would have preferred just the piano.

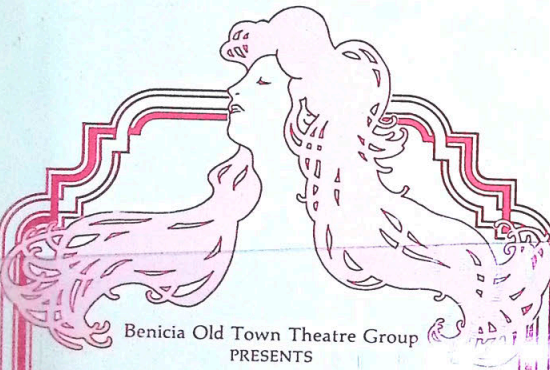
A very good dinner was served before the show. The food was plentiful and well-cooked, with a variety of flavors. The service was excellent.



BOTTG's show "Girl

A FLEA IN HER EAR

FALL 1979



Benicia Old Town Theatre Group
PRESENTS

A Flea In Her Ear

AN ADULT COMEDY
IN THREE ACTS

By Georges Feydeau
Translation By Barnett Shaw

DIRECTED BY
HARRY DIAVATIS

Production Designed By Doug Ham

Graphic Design - Benicia Advertising

'A Flea In Her Ear'

Old Town Theatre has a winner

By CATHY MCCLAIN
Panorama Editor

There's a treat in store for those who follow Benicia Old Town Theatre Group. The group's current offering, "A Flea in Her Ear," the French farce by Georges Feydeau, offers a delectable blend of slapstick and adult humor.

The plot surrounds the family Chandel and their friends. Yvonne Chandel believes her stuffy insurance agent spouse is deceiving her and enjoying a dalliance with another woman.

She sets out to trap him by sending him a perfumed letter asking for a rendezvous at the "Pretty Pussy Inn."

Merry Curran presents an adequate performance as her fiery Yvonne. Jan Harper offers a somewhat less than adequate performance as her husband, Victor Chandel. Harper also plays Poche, the porter at the "Pretty Pussy Inn." The characters confuse the look-alike names causing much confusion and frantic activity on stage during the second and third acts.

Don Homenides as Roman Tournel, the dashing friend of Yvonne, and Doug Custodio as the nephew, Victor Emmanuel and Doug Custodio as the nephew, Victor Emmanuel, are also in the cast.

Camille, Yvonne's maid, is played by Amy Osterholm. Camille is a French maid who is in love with Yvonne's husband. He plays the role of a French maid who is in love with Yvonne's husband. He plays the role of a French maid who is in love with Yvonne's husband.

pauses to try out his new silver palate. "To be or not to be, that is the question," he declares expansively, then scoots out the door.

Director Harry Diavatis believed the farce should not only sound funny but appear funny and he staged several "sight gags" in an effort to achieve that effect.

Numbering among these are the costumes worn by Bill Barron as Roman Tournel. The tall blond actor makes his first appearance on stage outfitted entirely in white and candy pink. He shows up in the second act in a garrishly striped suit.

Barron offered the second-best laugh of the show in the third act when he is coming home with Yvonne after having been spotted with her by her husband at the "Pretty Pussy Inn."

Yvonne fearlessly marches through her front door. Tournel hesitates outside then pokes his head in, scurrying away to check the place out.

Tickets for the dinner-theater may be purchased at Wolf's Drugs, in Benicia, and at Munter Music in Vallejo, or by calling 745-1491, evenings.

Feydeau Farce Brightens Up Benicia

By MAGGIE GRUM

Every time I head across the bridge to go to the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's ratty dinner theater, I wonder why on earth we don't have a dinner theater in Contra Costa. No doubt there are a hundred logical reasons, but it certainly would be fun.

The BOTTG, which does two shows every year, has chosen as its fall opener Georges Feydeau's uproarious farce, "A Flea in Her Ear," set in Paris in 1910.

It is the story of Victor Emmanuel Chandel, the innocent husband, whose jealous wife decides he is being unfaithful to her — of course, she has a lover, but that is quite permissible, at least in her eyes. To trap him, Yvonne's chum, Lucienne, writes a letter to Chandel inviting him to a rendezvous at the Pretty Pussy Inn. Chandel, puzzled but enormously flattered, shows the mysterious letter to his friend, Don Homenides de Histangua, who explodes in righteous wrath when he recognizes the writing as that of his own dear and virtuous wife, Lucienne.

In the second act the scene shifts to the Pretty Pussy Inn, operated by Ferrillon, who is determined to run a "respectable" place. But all hell breaks loose when Yvonne, heavily veiled, arrives and nearly faints dead away when she spots Poche, the porter who is a carbon copy of her husband. Also drawn to the hotel are Camille Chandel, who cannot pronounce his consonants without the aid of a magic silver palate. ("To be or not to be" sounds like "Oo es aw ah oo ee.") Camille is hot in pursuit of Chandel's mini-skirted parlor maid, who just happens to be married to Chandel's valet. Other visitors at the inn are the fiery Don Homenides and Lucienne.

A wild chase ensues as everyone tries to avoid being caught in compromising circumstances. And there's a bed — installed by the hotelkeeper — that revolves, each time revealing a new and unsuspected occupant.

A snifter of brandy, available at the Benicia Dinner Theater on West J Street, is a veritable necessity as well as pleasure during the delicious second act.

The director of the mad and wonderfully entertaining action onstage is Harry Diavatis, who has done an admirable job in directing this famous farce and in arranging the inordinately complex exits and entrances, all demanding split-second timing.

Jim Harper of Pleasant Hill (a familiar and popular figure on the Civic Arts stage) plays the dual role of Chandel/Poche with rollicking success. Dave Custodio convulses the audience both with and without his silver palate. Jan O'Gara, who was instrumental in the organi-

zation of the Contra Costa Musical Theater, plays Lucienne with a wicked spunk. Merry Curran romps through her role as the curious wife, Yvonne, and Bill Barron gives panache to his role as her lover, Roman Tournel.

Also giving distinctive and original interpretations of

their outrageous roles are Amy Osterholm as the ready-for-adventure maid, Patrick Payton as her bossy husband, Etienne, Danny Clark as the know-it-all doctor, Doc Scott and Betty McFadden as the secretary who takes orders of the Pretty Pussy Inn, Doug Ham, enormously funny as the boozing English guest, Janice Cooper as yet another maid, and Fred Hunter as Baptiste.

The records and airboards set, magnificently designed by Doug Ham, represents the labor of many dedicated supporters of the BOTTG.

You may laugh and sip brandy at the Benicia Old Town Theater Fridays and Saturdays through Nov. 17. The special hour starts at 6:30 and the saga of Chandel/Poche starts at 8:30. For reservations phone (707) 745-1491.



Jim Harper and Jan O'Gara lead the chase in "A Flea in Her Ear" at the Benicia Old Town Theater.

Friday, October 19, 1979

The Solano College Viva October 19, 1979

"A Flea in Her Ear" Comedy play produced

"An Evening with a French Flair" is the title given to Benicia Old Town Group's production of Georges Feydeau's "A Flea in Her Ear." This adult comedy opened Oct. 12 with a special champagne gala and is presented as dinner theatre.

The cast is headed by Jim Harper of Pleasant Hills, a veteran of the Benicia stage, in the double role of Chandel, a French insurance man, and Poche, a hotel porter. Jan O'Gara, who has been in many Contra Costa productions and premieres on the Benicia stage in "Flea," is Lucienne, a beautiful and sophisticated French lady who causes most of the complications. Featured as proprietors of the "Pretty Pussy Inn" are Doc Scott of Orinda, and Betty McFadden of Fairfield, who has performed in many local productions, who makes her debut on the Benicia stage in "Flea." Two lovely French maids enliven matters and are played by Amy Osterholm of Orinda and Janice Cooper of Benicia. The talented valet is portrayed by Patrick Payton of Martinez. A society doctor is portrayed by Danny Clark of Benicia. Dave Custodio of Antioch is Camille, Chandel's cousin and secretary. Doug Ham of Concord is a fashion-



Betty McFadden

able guest at the "Pretty Pussy Inn." Yvonne, wife of Chandel, is Merry Curran of Benicia. Martin "Red" Levine, is Don Homenides de Histangua, the passionate Spaniard. Bill Barron of Benicia is Tournel, a French Don Juan. Fred Hunter is Baptiste, the decoy at the "Pretty Pussy Inn."

The elaborate set was designed and executed by Doug Ham. Harry Diavatis is director. Reservations are required and may be obtained by calling (707) 745-1491. Tickets are \$11 for dinner and the show. They can be obtained from Wolff's Drugs in Benicia and Munter Music in Vallejo. The production runs Friday and Saturday evenings through November 17. Dinner is at 7:15 p.m., with an 8:30 p.m. curtain.



Aghast at being discovered by their employer Chandel (Jim Harper) at the Pretty Pussy Inn, the maid (Amy Osterholm) and Camille (Dave Custodio). "A Flea in Her Ear" Friday and Saturday evenings through Nov. 17.

Orderly chaos by BOTTG

'Flea' makes you laugh

By Leslye Asera

What do a revolving bed, a male secretary with a speech impediment and a partly dressed Englishman with a whip have in common? They're all part of the frenzied fun that goes on during "A Flea in Her Ear," the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's current production.

The play is a French farce about the attempts of a jealous wife to find out if her husband is unfaithful. She contrives to get her husband to meet her at the Pretty Pussy Inn by pretending in a letter to be his secret admirer. Many complications and surprises await her before the evening is over. Her unfortunate circumstances provide much hilarity as the complicated plot progresses.

Merry Curran as the jealous wife, Yvonne Chandel, and Jan O'Gara as her best friend Lucienne carry their part of the show very well. There are long sequences between these two ladies that are potentially very tedious, but the ladies get through them with flying colors. O'Gara is especially talented in moving things along while still appearing unburied.

Jim Harper as Victor Emmanuel Chandel, Yvonne's husband, is a properly bewildered gentleman throughout. He also plays his ringer, Poche, the hotel porter, so he has many last changes to make and two different characters to create. He does both effectively.

So much for the relatively normal characters in this show. The remainder of the cast includes several preposterous and funny roles which BOTTG was fortunately able to fill with very funny people. Dave Custodio does an excellent job as Camille, Chandel's secretary with a speech impediment. Custodio delivers his lines without using any consonants... much to the amusement of strangers and the delight of the

audience. Bill Barron is effectively Tournel, the conceited and whumpy matador husband of Lucienne, but in a manner and dress are perfect.

Red Levine, as the hot blooded, Spanish almost beyond repair to an already unbelievable person. The production of the Pretty Pussy Inn, played by Doc Scott and Betty McFadden, are in life, both in girth and spirit. And a show on several entrances is the a Rugby, played by Doug Ham. Rugby is a show for unusual clothes.

Lending support to this crazy mess, Amy Osterholm as Antoinette, the Patrick Payton as Etienne, her husband, and Danny Clark as Baptiste, and Janice Cooper as Eugenie, the maid.

The set, by Doug Ham, is easily elaborate. But BOTTG has ever used must change from Chandel's living to the Pretty Pussy Inn (complete with rug, fountain and stairway) and back deteriorating lavishment of the inn, done, and Ham has done a remarkable very small space.

Direction by Harry Diavatis is a little heavy handed on occasion, but created a very funny show with wily derly chaos matched by perfect characters. If laughter is truly medicine, then see this show for what it is.

Benicia Old Town Theatre Group presents "A Flea in Her Ear" at the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group. The production runs Friday and Saturday evenings through November 17. Dinner theatre with 6:30 dinner at 7:15 and curtain at 8:30. Tickets are \$11 for dinner and the show. They can be obtained from Wolff's Drugs in Benicia and Munter Music in Vallejo, or by calling 745-1491, evenings.

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Herald, Friday, January 27, 1984

'Spoon River' opens tonight

and Saturday evening opening weekend Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of Edgar Lee Masters' "Spoon River Anthology" at the IDES Hall, 140 West J St.

"Spoon River" is a collection of poems and conversations of citizens of the town of Spoon River, who lived from the Civil War era until the 1920s. The poems, which have been passed over the years, are a collection of the town's history, its triumphs and its tragedies, its joys and its sorrows. The poems are a collection of the town's history, its triumphs and its tragedies, its joys and its sorrows.



Pictured from BOTTG's 'Spoon River' are (back row) Donna Nunes, auto harp, Tom Murphy, musical advisor, Steve Tufft, guitar, actor Matt Cater, (middle row) Susan Harlow, Georgia Taylor Benedicte, Claudia Yuhas, and (seated) Kenn Stevens.

of the art of the show. Hope to see members of the Strait Stitches, a quilting society, have a special exhibit of their work. The show will be a celebration of the town's history, its triumphs and its tragedies, its joys and its sorrows.

edibles for the show. The theme of the show will be a celebration of the town's history, its triumphs and its tragedies, its joys and its sorrows.

cocktails will be served from 7:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. The bar staff will be on hand to serve you.

will be offering Irish Coffees for the first time during this show. Patrons who attend opening weekend of 'Spoon River', in addition to being able to enjoy the music of the J Street String Band, will be eligible for preferred seating during the Gala Opening Weekend of the group's spring musical 'Side By Side By Sondheim'.

BOTTG's twentieth year, the group will award a trip for two to the MGM Grand in Reno to some lucky 'Sondheim' opening weekend patron. 'Spoon River' is directed by Benicia Linda Barron, and will run Friday and Saturday evenings through Feb. 18. Tickets are \$6.50 and may be reserved by calling 746-1269. Remaining unreserved tickets will be available at the door.



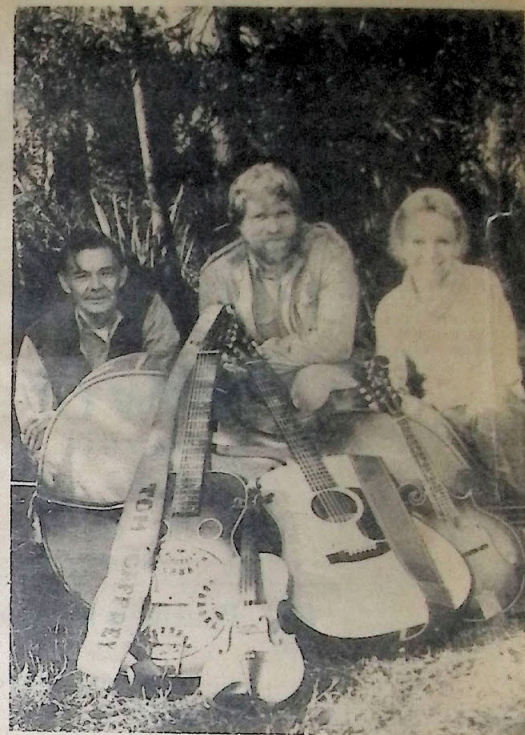
Georgia Benedict Taylor Matt Cater
Claudia Yuhas

Benicia Herald, Wednesday, January 25, 1984

Benicia's J Street String Band to play for after-show parties

The J Street String Band, headed by two local bluegrass musicians, is gaining a reputation in Benicia. Formed two years ago by Orlita and Carl Nelson, the String Band plays regularly at the Bronze Seal and at Sam's Harbor. Most recently they have agreed to provide some of their special tunes for opening weekend patrons who come to see the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group production of 'Spoon River Anthology'.

They are donating the Friday and Saturday night performances, Jan. 27 and 28, in the interest of helping another performing arts group. BOTTG welcomes the band as a perfect finish to a very homespun evening. Edgar Lee Masters' play is a collection of small scenes and conversations quoted by the citizens of the town of Spoon River, who have 'passed over' and are looking back at their life experiences. The show includes many simple and lovely folk tunes which provide a rich, Americana quilted background for the play. The addition of the J Street Band as after-show entertainment seems especially appropriate.



J Street String Band members Tom Caffrey, Carl Nelson and Orlita Nelson.

Orlita, who sings and plays lead guitar, has lived in Benicia all of her life, and in fact, she says, in the same house. Husband Carl plays stand-up bass and helps with harmonies. The group is lucky to have two additional performers who have gained national recognition from bluegrass fans. Former Benicia resident Keith Little is a top fiddle and banjo player. He can be heard on the 'Music from the Gold Country' album with Vern Williams and on a new record by Rose Maddox, one of

America's original bluegrass singers. Tom Caffrey, on dobro, has traveled all over the world and the United States with the Caffrey Family Band and has appeared on many albums in his 35 years as a performer. The Caffrey family participated in the Festival of American Folklife, sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution and the National Park Service to celebrate the Bicentennial. They also traveled extensively overseas performing in USO

shows in Japan, the Philippines and Hawaii. Those interested in catching the band this weekend can call 746-1269 for reserved seats. Tickets are \$6.50 for the play plus the after show party. Doors open at 7:30, with a no-host bar and dessert available before curtain time. Opening weekend patrons will also be eligible for preferred seating for BOTTG's spring production of the musical 'Side By Side By Sondheim'.



Opening is next Friday

Keeping the evenings lively in the town of Spoon River are 'Ladies of the night' Daisy Fraser (Claudia Yuhas) and seated, Aner Clute (Sue Harlow), in the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group production of Edgar Lee Masters' 'Spoon River Anthology', opening Jan. 27 at 8:30 p.m. at the IDES Hall, 140 West J St. Opening weekend audience will enjoy the music of the J Street String Band after the show. Tickets are \$6.50. For reservations, call 746-1269.

28A—The NAPA REGISTER Saturday, February 4, 1984

Cast rises above material in latest BOTTG offering

By L. PIERCE CARSON
Register Staff Writer

BENICIA — "Where are Elmer, Herman, Bert, Tom and Charley, the weak of the will, the strong of the arm, the clown, the boozier, the fighter? All, all, are sleeping on the hill."

That's the opening stanza of Edgar Lee Masters' "Spoon River Anthology," a collection of poetic portraits of the inhabitants of a small Midwestern town.

So begins a sequence of short related poems, or epigrams, by which inhabitants of Spoon River speak intimately of themselves, in microbiographies, revealing their essential lives from the vantage point of the grave.

The author's ghosts gossip candidly about one another, fearless in their revelations of intimate details of one another's lives, and, when first published, much to the chagrin of early 20th century America.

When "Spoon River Anthology" first appeared in 1915, it was hailed as a new form of literary expression, a breakthrough in its candid treatment of small town mores.

The work was subsequently staged and in the early 1960s achieved some notoriety on Broadway.

The stage play has been revived by Benicia Old Town Theatre Group as part of its current season. It opened in IDES Hall last Friday night and is playing Friday and Saturday nights through Feb. 18. While BOTTG generally stages dinner

theater, this offering is not presented in that vein. Instead, desserts and drinks are offered patrons prior to the 8:30 p.m. curtain.

To be honest, this is not a work for the casual theatergoer.

The setting is a graveyard, not an "up" locale, to be sure. The audience meets dozens of characters who relate their lives, loves, disappointments and so on in short epitaphs. For this viewer, the work seemed terribly dated, almost a museum piece. Even an excellent cast couldn't, if you'll pardon the phrase, breathe much life into the piece.

But "Spoon River Anthology" is a classic and, as such, really should be either read or seen. I would recommend a visit to IDES Hall as this first-rate cast will do all the work for you.

Particularly outstanding in a variety of roles are Georgia Taylor Benedict and Kenn Stevens, while Jim Nelson, Claudia Yuhas, Susan Harlow and Matt Cater also fare quite well, creating new personae every few minutes.

Musicians Steve Tufft, Donna Nunes and Dale Yost provide superb music throughout the evening.

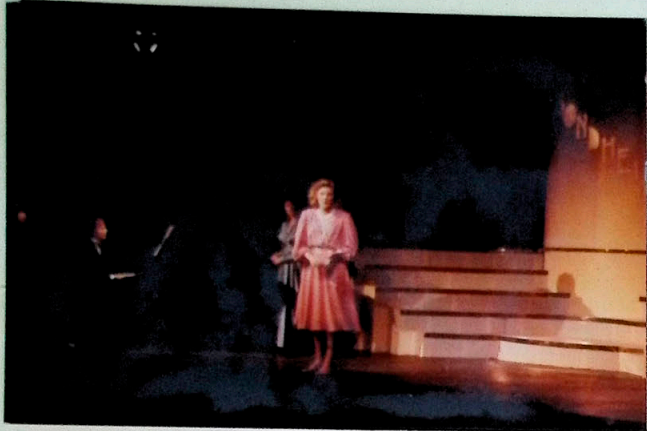
The direction by Linda Barron leaves little to be desired and Doug Ham's set evokes the proper mood for all occasions.

In short, the production rises head and shoulders above the material. A hallmark it might have been in 1915, but that doesn't mean it's still a cut above works that have succeeded it.



Claudia Yuhas (seated), Matt Cater and Georgia Taylor Benedict appear in Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of Edgar Lee Masters' "Spoon River Anthology," now at IDES Hall, 140 West J St., Benicia, Fridays and Saturdays through Feb. 18.

SIDE BY SIDE BY SONDHEIM
SPRING - 1984



Hard at work on the set for the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's coming production of 'Side by Side by Sondheim' are (left to right) foreman and master carpenter Willard Daniel and assistants Joe Henderson and Jack Mahoney. The musical tribute to the works of Stephen Sondheim will open April 6 for a six weekend run through May 12. Tickets for the dinner-theatre presentation at the IDES Hall, 140 West J St. are \$16.50 and are available by calling 746-1269.



Allison Woolley and Dan Johnson discuss "The Little Things V. er," a number from "Side by Side by Sondheim" currently being the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group at IDES Hall.

'Side by Side by Sondheim' is good, but a bit over

Reviewed by Abel Kessler
Times correspondent

BENICIA — Class is the word for the "Side by Side by Sondheim" dinner-show provided by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group at IDES Hall.

An appreciative first night audience Friday cast a unanimous vote for the collage of creations by Stephen Sondheim presented by a talented quintet. The sophisticated set and the accompaniment by two pianists added to the enjoyment.

The wealth of Sondheim's music and lyrics is oversupplied in this offering. Too much of a good thing is hard to complain about, but the production would not suffer if a few of the 35 numbers were eliminated.

Once more Doug Ham is entitled to an award nomination for direction and production design. Alongside to receive a prize should be Joe Barnett for musical direction.

But the onstage team still must score the points — and it tallies a lot. Not only is the vocalizing a winning force but also the touches of comedy, change of pace and projection to the audience count in the one-sided victory.

No one performer can make a rounded result like a combination of exceptional players. But every group usually has a stand-out and Kristy Barber fills that berth. From funny ditties like "I Never Do Anything Twice" to the tear-in-the-eye "Send in the Clowns," she captures the audience. By hand balloting the onlookers showed they want her to continue in her post of entertainer.

There may be better voices on the professional stage, but heard very few that can rival Dan Johnson. Not to hear but his stage presence is a standard to be copied by one number as he picks one number as he picks in so many. How "Not a Day Goes By" mind.

The Sondheim sag brought together by the appealing Kathleen Knewcomer to the Bay presses with her spirit and well timed delivery, sure of the person Sondheim actress who should be a Her singing of "Anastasia" could be improved.

Alison Woolley possesses trained voice. In this, he group, she demonstrates variety post in any one solo. "Losing My Mind" worth crossing the bridge is not all she offers. In "Boy Fox Trot" number, her, she proves getting her repertoire.

Every good squad around person and Fred that. Besides lending numbers he coordinates single with "Marry Me."

The should be attended being presented at IDES through May 12, with shows on April 29 and 30. Information call (707) 8

Benicia
Old Town
Theatre Group
presents...

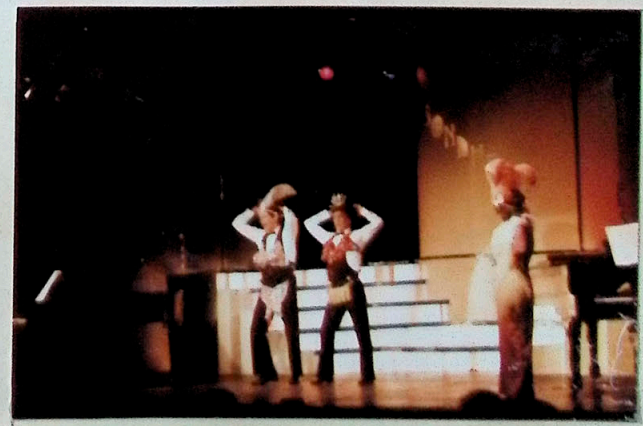
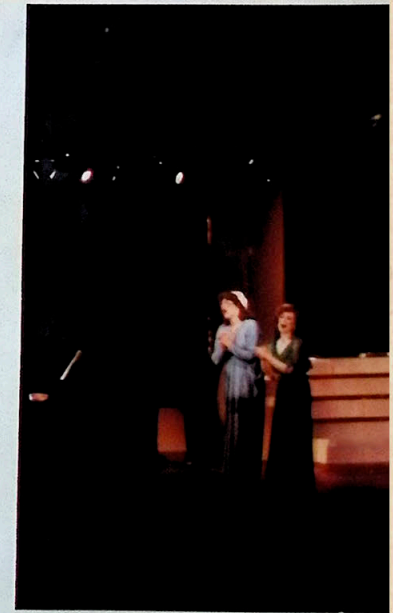
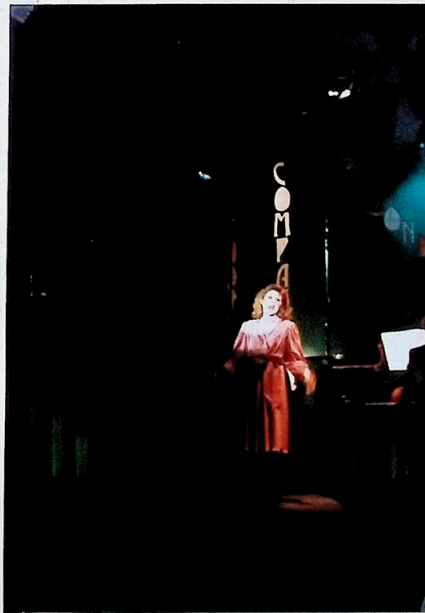
the
musical
tribute

Side By Side By SONDHEIM



**Directed and
Designed by
DOUG HAM**

**Musical
Direction
by JOE
BARNETT**





A startled Charles sees the ghost of his first wife Elvira for the first time in BOTTG's 'Blithe Spirit', Opening Oct. 14 for a six week run. For tickets and information, call (707) 746-1269.

4-Benicia Herald, Friday, November 11, 1983



Works by Muriel Evans are being featured this show by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group. During performances of 'Blithe Spirit', her large floral pieces can be seen adorning the walls of the IDES Hall, 140 West J St. Evans owns and operates Evans Gallery and Art Supplies, 901 First St. 'Blithe Spirit' continues as dinner-theatre Nov. 11, 12, 18 and 19. A non-dinner show is set for this Sunday, Nov. 13 at 7:30 p.m. Tickets will be available at the door. For dinner reservations, call 746-1269.



Madame Arcati (Georgia Taylor Benedict) center, instructs seance participants Dr. Bradman (Brooks London), Ruth (Rene Galleran), Charles (Dan Clark) and Mrs. Bradman (Marie Wedell) in Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of Noel Coward's comedy 'Blithe Spirit', which opens Friday at the IDES Hall, 140 West J St. in Benicia for a six weekend run. For reservations to this dinner-theatre presentation, call 746-1269. Tickets are \$16.50.

Complete TV listings Oct. 28-Nov. 3

Inside entertainment

'Blithe Spirit' pace needs to be quicker

BENICIA — Described as an improbable farce, Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's 'Blithe Spirit,' doesn't quite come up to that, or up to either good comedy or drama, for that matter.

Although pleasant enough at times, the production drags for nearly three hours and surely would be improved with a quicker pace and better direction.

This is a potentially amusing story about a writer and his wife, Ruth, who employ a medium to perform a seance and inadvertently conjure up the writer's deceased first wife.

It's a good play with plenty of comic lines and elements of farce. It also has the potential for some significant revelations about the characters and their relationships.

But most of the comedy and virtually all the character examination are lost in less than skillful acting and a dreadfully slow pace.

And the farce is only effective in the character of the wacky medium Madame Arcati, played by Georgia Taylor Benedict.

The savior of this production, Benedict creates the effervescent medium whose dynamic personality is tentatively balanced somewhere between intensity and total zaniness.

Benedict at times creates the classic farcical medium, leaning to bizarre, mystical habits, and being totally consumed in ridiculous trances.

She's all the classic things one would expect a medium to be, draped in wizardly garb, riding into the living room on her bicycle and toting a mystical handbag from which she produces a garlic wreath, crystal ball and sprinklings of things like lizard tongues.

Sometimes a wise, mysterious visionary, Benedict at those times also plays just on the edge of comedy, especially in her righteous dedication to the world of the unseen.

Her chameleonic moods aside, Benedict's Arcati is captivating and commands the audience's attention throughout, a solo achievement in this production.

An effective but less than lively performance by Dan Clark as the remarried widower Charles, is complemented by the ghostly antics of his mischievous first wife Elvira, played by Sylvia Kratins.

An ethereal beauty, Elvira is devilish in her childish games and in her taunting mockery of Charles' second wife Ruth.

Kratins is effective and believable as the reincarnated object of Charles' love, especially in her selfish and all too human schemes.

A rather simple story that could reveal a wealth of intrigue surrounding the trio, this production fails to entice the audience about those secrets and to develop



Madame Arcati, played by Georgia Taylor Benedict, center, leads a seance with, from left, Brooks London, Rene Galleran, Dan Clark, Marie Wedell.

the personal conflicts written in the script.

As the pragmatic Ruth, Rene Galleran has some good moments but was ineffective by losing many lines to poor enunciation.

Galleran had a potentially strong stage presence as Charles' more mature second wife, but her delivery is labored and less than convincing.

She works well with Clark however, as the couple create a mostly believable relationship.

Clark seems to be a key in that achievement, supporting Kratins as well as Galleran in the two widely divergent relationships.

This dinner-theater production has some good moments and would be greatly improved if only through a shortened performance time.

Long delays between scenes and two intermissions in a play that follows a 90-minute dinner hour, keep the audience in their seats for more than four hours.

There are some cute surprises in the plot, but after such a long wait, the viewer could well be weary and thus uninterested in those revelations.

Those who enjoy dinner theater shouldn't miss this

however, since the light comedy production is a nice complement to a very pleasant meal, catered by Benicia's Washington House Deli.

The evening begins with no-host cocktails at 6:40 p.m. and dinner at 7:15 p.m.

The curtain is at 8:30 p.m.

Performances continue Friday and Saturday evenings through Nov. 19 at IDES Hall, 140 W. J St.

Reservations, \$16.50, are available by calling 746-1269.

A special non-dinner show is scheduled 8 p.m. Nov. 13 at a \$6.50 ticket price.

Georgia Benedict is the effervescent medium whose personality is balanced between intensity and total zaniness.

Friday

October 7, 1983

Opening for BOTTG show is only one week away

With only a week until opening night, the Benicia Old Town theatre Group is busy putting the finishing touches on the elaborate, wood-paneled set for its production of Noel Coward's 'Blithe Spirit'.

The comedy takes place in the library/living room of British writer Charles Condomine's home. Thanks to a seance conducted by the mystic Madame Arcati, the ghost of

Charles' first wife appears, to cause quite a bit of comic stress between Charles and his second wife.

The dinner-theatre production will be catered by the Washington House Deli of Benicia. The menu will include green salad with creamy onion dressing, home baked bread loaf, pork loin with fresh plum sauce, rice with mushrooms, dilled carrots, cheesecake with blueberry sauce and

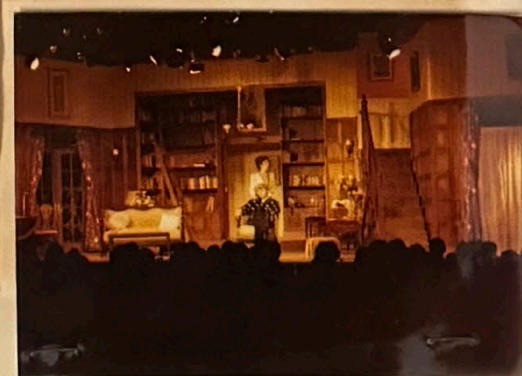
coffee or tea.

No-host cocktails will be available from 6:30 p.m. with dinner at 7:15 p.m. and curtain at 8:30 p.m. The \$16.50 ticket price includes dinner and the show. An additional non-dinner Sunday evening performance will take place Nov. 13, with a 7:30 curtain.

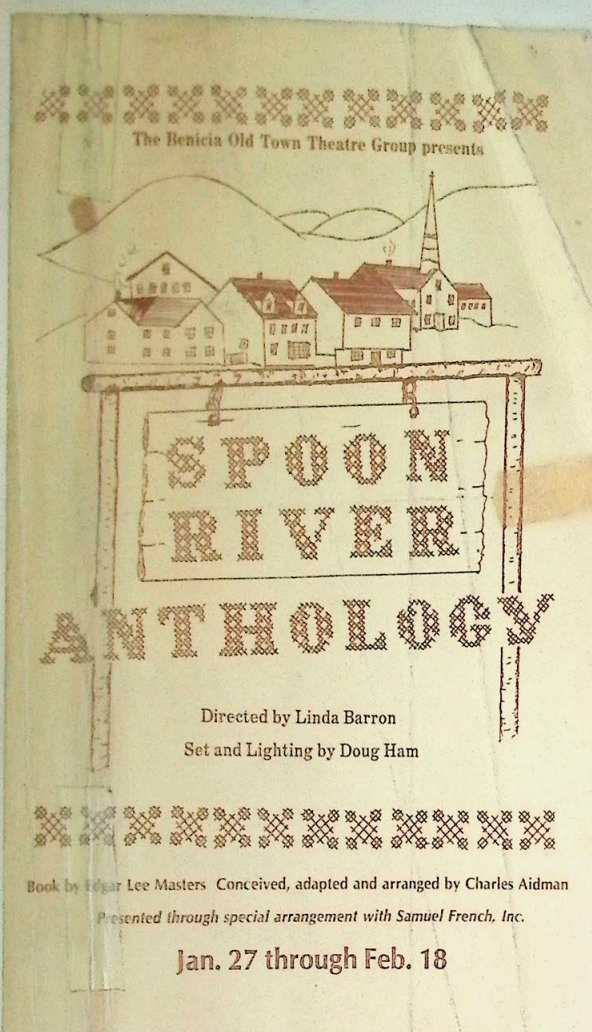
Tickets are \$6.50. 'Blithe Spirit' will play Friday and Saturday evenings, Oct. 14 through Nov. 19. For reservations, call 746-1269.



A ghostly Elvira (Sylvia Kratins) spies on Edith (Andrea Gorman) in BOTTG's 'Blithe Spirit'.



WINTER SHOW - 1984
SPOON RIVER ANTHOLOGY



ContraCostaTimes Page 6B—Tuesday, January 31, 1984



Kenna Stevens is Knowl Hobermer and Claudia Yuhas is Lydia Puckett in "Spoon River Anthology," a Benicia Old Town Theatre Group production.

'Spoon River' players have plenty to reveal

Reviewed by Abel Kessler
Times correspondent

BENICIA — Have you ever been curious about the unrevealed lives of people in a small town?

You will be amused, saddened and always kept interested in what the inhabitants of a Midwestern community reveal in "Spoon River Anthology," a unique presentation by the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group.

This splendid effort affords the performers a rare opportunity to depict different characters during one show. This six principals magically slip from one role to another with an ease that the audience not only accepts, but heartily approves.

Backed up by music that fits exactly the moods portrayed, the players never leave the stage, changing costumes and characters in full view.

The personal stories are based on the narrative poems of Edgar Lee Masters. When his "Spoon River Anthology" was published about 70 years ago, it was recognized as a major contribution to modern poetry and his status has remained at the top. In the short autobiographical monologues that make up the play, the departed tell what life has brought them and what they think now that their race has been run.

Directed by Linda Barron, each performer takes center stage several times — and all come through with such skill that no one can be singled out as the star. All deserve that rating as they range from humor to grief in the tales — some of which could be used to upgrade soap operas of today.

In alphabetical order, the gifted players are Georgia Taylor Benedict, Matt Cates, Susan Harloe, Jim Nielsen, Kenna Stevens and Claudia Yuhas. They also augment the musical portion of the program, displaying clear diction and pleasant voices.

The musicians add an enjoyable dimension to the offering. Donna Nunes attracts attention with her autoharp while Steve Telford and Dale Yost provide guitar accompaniment. Cates also contributes a guitar while Yuhas shows exceptional singing ability in solos. Nielsen, who has proven himself in the past as a dramatic actor, surprised everyone by proving he can sing as well as he acts. Tom Murphy is musical adviser.

The set designed by Doug Ham once more affirms his high place in that department. The constant shifts in characters are gracefully complemented by the props.

If there is any flaw — and this is really being picky — there is too much offered in each of the two acts. Every one of the stories is absorbing, but even too much dessert can be hard to take.

An attempt to keep track in the drama of the types of persons pictured proved futile. The range ran from folks who glory in life itself to those who snuff out the lives of others. In between are love, greed and the many paradoxes of life. The rich who leave Spoon River yearn to come back, the poor yearn to leave. Such is life.

This show is presented Friday and Saturday evenings at 8:30 p.m. at Ides Hall through Feb. 18. For more information call (707) 746-1269.



Georgia Taylor Benedict (left), Claudia Yuhas and Matt Cates take many roles among the Spoon River populace.

A Well-Done Play

SPOON RIVER ANTHOLOGY. Play. Continuing through Feb. 18 at the IDES Hall, 140 West J St., Benicia. Tickets are \$2.50 at the door or by calling 746-1269.

By SUE MOTE
Reporter Feature Writer

Stand six people on a stage and ask them to portray about 70 characters, none of them receiving more than a few minutes for the task of revealing each personage.

Boring? It should be, but it wasn't.

A challenge. You bet. And Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's production of "Spoon River Anthology" has met the challenge well.

Beginning with the downhomey decorations on the stairway up to the theater in the IDES Hall on J Street and continuing with the quilts, red table cloths and wood-spoon dolls setting the mood, the journey back to the small town of Spoon River is worth the trip.

The danger with this play, adapted from the original 1915 poetry of Edgar Lee Masters, is not frothiness but the opposite: the characters reveal truths about themselves and their culture that threaten to sink the play with gloom.

Indeed, when Masters first published the work the reaction was one of shock at his harsh perceptions of the dimensions of individual suffering and viciousness.

Just in the nick of time,

however, after we have dip quickly beneath the pleasant surfaces of these townsperson the darkness, we meet a few characters who seem to have succeeded living life both and cheerfully, a rare corn in this collection.

Offering an uncommonly performance is Matt Cates, takes roles as the "solid" — lawyers, doctors, judges the like — as well as those "plain" older men. His entire body conveys the feelings of characters, and excellent attention is given to the val pauses.

Other strong performance were offered by Kenna Stevens, confused soldiers, scoundrels and the like) am Nielsen, the ladies' man.

Adding to the evening are series of folk tunes, some of familiar ("Who Knows Who Goin'"). "Sow Took the Men and others written for the p Two guitarists added their but Donna Nunes with her autoharp and superb folk at a real charmer. The other f vocalist, and also actress, Claudia Yuhas, suffered fr hardness both in her voice a her acting.

Georgia Taylor Benedict, Susan Harloe were cast lar the classy, mother type and temptress respectively.

Go to "Spoon River" and on some scrumptious home, desserts and a revealing lo humanity.

In review - 'Spoon River Anthology'

4-Benicia Herald, Friday, February 3, 1984

Show is emotionally stunning

By Linda Sell

Theatregoers expecting the Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's current production of Edgar Lee Masters' "Spoon River Anthology" to be the kind of lighthearted presentation typically seen on the local stage had best prepare for a totally different experience.

For "Spoon River Anthology" does not cavort or gawdle. It does not evoke peals of giddy laughter, neither does it simply unfold as an "entertainment" to be observed casually for amusement. This play demands your undivided attention.

The piece is a series of brief, bittersweet interludes with characters who speak from beyond the grave. They are witty, wise, bitter, sardonic and circumspect about lives they led, now but arise recalled through the haunting scrim of the beyond. In the true definition of vignette, these fleeting portraits are tendrils which weave a fragile link from

the past to the present for those who care to listen. Six people wear the mantles of nearly 80 characters, recounting the events and occurrences which mark their post-Civil war lives in the town of Spoon River.

Director Linda Barron has scattered her characters like seeds across the stage, each waiting for his or her turn to sprout momentarily into a character. Juxtaposed against rather bland visual effects, the colorful imageries they create burst forth like overripe fruits from withered skins.

Wonderful performances are turned in by Georgia Taylor Benedict, Matt Cates, Susan Harloe, Jim Nielsen, Kenna Stevens and Claudia Yuhas. The group is integrated so thoroughly with the prose of this play that all deserve equal accolades for carrying off this difficult work beautifully.

While the BOTTG usually concentrates on lighter shows for its twice annual dinner

theatre productions, the concept of having an interim non-dinner show once a year has allowed the group new flexibility to explore other types of theatre. Though "Spoon River" may have a narrower base of appeal than standard community theatre fare, it aspires to something much greater.

An occasionally weak moment or incompletely developed character is immediately forgiven, for the message of this show runs clearly and with vision. There are few props, the movement is limited, but the show is emotionally stunning.

A trio of acoustic musicians adds depth to this production, and Doug Ham's stark set is effective. Kudos must go to the excellent lighting technicians who illuminated this show perfectly.

"Spoon River Anthology" runs Friday and Saturday evenings through February 18. Tickets at \$6.50 may be reserved by phoning 746-1269.



Matt Cates and Georgia Taylor Benedict in 'Spoon River'.

'Spoon River' rushes with mixed emotions

By DIANE MANN
Times-Herald Staff Writer

BENICIA — Spoon River rushes with a torrent of familiar, but bittersweet emotion in Benicia Old Town Theatre Group's latest production "Spoon River Anthology."

Set in a fantasized, early 20th Century American country town, the production is a collection vignettes rich with truths about the timeless conflicts of the human heart.

While exposing the folly of generations of American moral standards, the stylized play shows that the heart remains constant in its desire to grow, to find love and happiness.

Those who cling to tradition and social morality and those who violate it become of one heart in this intense work. It artfully studies the human desire for fulfillment and poignantly reveals the pain of failing to achieve that goal.

Some of the finest moments in this play, which opened at IDES Hall last weekend, were created by Matt Cates who achieved a sterling likeness to each of his various characters.

Each of the cast members constantly changed to create the numerous characters in the Spoon River community who speak from the grave. The characters told a timeless human story of love, hate, frustration, confusion and emptiness.

That story, perhaps most importantly, asked why convention and social standards, rather than individual choice, often shape lives.

It also asked why people can be overpowered and crippled by the silent, invisible power of emotion.

Cates is flawless as he becomes various deceased men of Spoon River. He is funny and entertaining as a bespectacled husband, wise and experienced as a charitable town physician and tragic as an overworked, underloved store keeper.

Cates spins a wonderful yarn. In a couple of scenes he put the audience on the mythical front porch of his American farmhouse using a persona so real one forgets there's a stage separating the actor and audience.

His achievements don't stand alone in this production, which also features the versatile skills of Kenna Stevens and Jim Nielsen, the innocent and tragic demagogue of Claudia Yuhas and the seductive talents of Susan Harloe and Georgia Taylor Benedict.

Stevens is at his best as the town's good-natured black man, a character who is content and satisfied despite his separation from the rest of the community. Stevens is in one scene the town blacksmith, clever-

(Continued from page 1)

ly adopting the nimble mannerisms of such a character. In another scene he's a farmhand who sleeps in the hay and is proud he can snuggle under a horse for warmth without getting kicked.

Harloe plays a passionate lover, a flirtatious milliner, and a disappointed wife whose eight children lead to her untimely death. Like the other actors, Harloe takes on the various personalities, maintaining a constant stream of story fragments that tell familiar tales of triumph and tragedy.

The skillful cast tells how marriage can rob a woman of her youth and beauty and rob a man of his strength, pride and tenderness.

The characters also show how too much work and not enough love can lead to an early grave, and how selfishness and greed lead to destruction.

But this show isn't without humor and levity and it's spiced with folk music interspersed between the scenes. The show encourages celebration and things like "fiddle playin'." It teaches that "the earth keeps a vibration going," an energy that sustains the heart through love and passion for life.

"The power of unseen between souls" allows lovers to "know passion and fade away together," one character reveals.

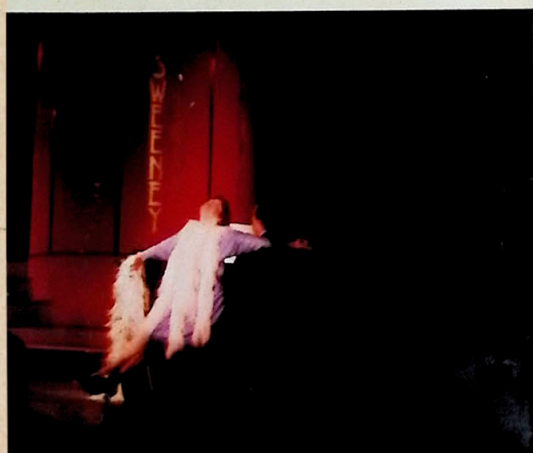
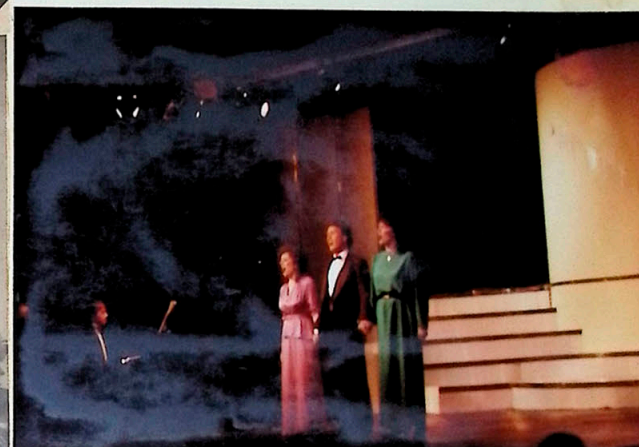
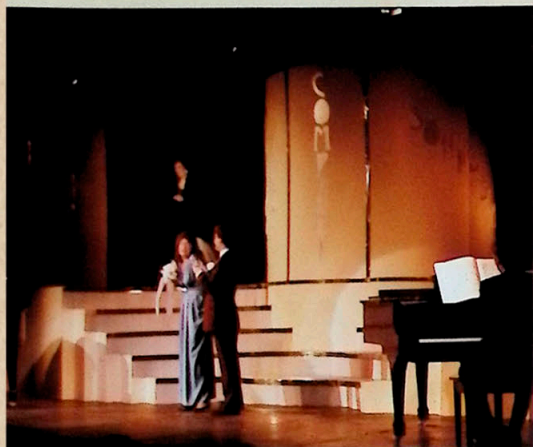
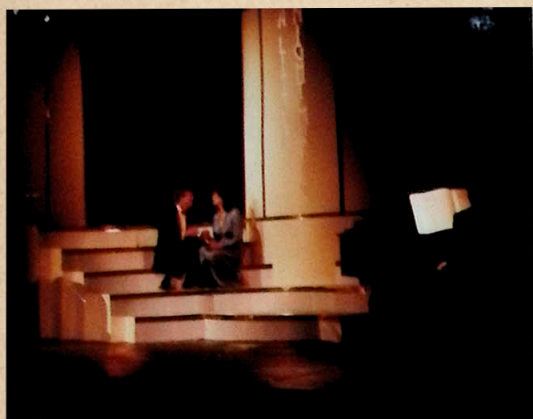
Another also warns that "life (can be) too strong for you. It takes life to love life."

This is an intense show which packs a wealth of humanity into a short space. But it has enough levity through the musical pieces and comic scenes to entertain most any audience.

An unusually strong cast carries the show, which could otherwise become bogged down by the continuing character changes and emotional intensity.

"Spoon River" continues 8:30 p.m. today and Saturday and Fridays and Saturdays through Feb. 18. Tickets, \$6.50, are available by calling 746-1269.

(See SPOON RIVER, page 2)



Alison Woolley (left) and Kristy Barber-Illusorio (right) extol the virtues of "a certain grocery clerk" (Dan Johnson) in "Can That Boy Fox Trot", from BOTTG's 'Side by Side by Sondheim'.

In review: 'Side by Side by Sondheim' Rich musical show a winner

By Linda Sell
The Benicia Old Town Theatre Group has turned its spotlight on songwriter and lyricist Stephen Sondheim, and the result is an evening rich in stirring music and lively humor.

The five-member cast is skillfully directed through its melodic/comedic pages by Benician Doug Ham, who also designed the simple but stunning set for this production.

Local theatre-goers will also recognize the magic touches of Musical Director Joe Barnett, now a veteran of BOTTG productions after Cabaret and Jacques Brel last season.

Two gleaming baby grand pianos flank the stage for a touch of true audiovisual class for this show, which is a compendium of Sondheim classics, some familiar, others obscure but all rife with his sardonic humor and social comment.

The songs are delightfully strung together by high-spirited narrator Kathleen Kelly Murphy, whose rapport with the audience lends insight into the history of Sondheim's music as well as provides a continuity and intimacy that is very pleasant.

Though Murphy does throw in a whimsical snippet of a tune occasionally, the musical portion of the show is dominated by a four-member ensemble which moves through an amazing number of Sondheim's tunes smoothly and with panache.

My favorite has to be Kristy Barber, who renders such show stoppers as "I'm Still Here" and the familiar "Send in the Clowns." But Barber's true forte is her comedic style, which when combined with strong vocals, makes for dynamite renditions of "I Never Do Anything Twice", in which she "trespasses on the shores of the double entendre" and "The Boy From," which is a spoof of "The Girl from Ipanema." Great fun.

By no means is my praise of Barber intended to diminish the outstanding performances of Fred Franklin, Allison Woolley and Dan Johnson, who comprise the rest of the quartet. All have their shining moments as well as con-

tributing to the slick, professional pace of the show.

Johnson, a Benician who teaches elemental music in Benicia's schools, has really come into his own with this show, though he has performed in numerous BOTTG productions in the past. His voice is stronger than ever, he is relaxed and polished and a total delight to watch, especially when he teams up, with tongue firmly implanted in cheek, with Allison Woolley for "The Little Things," all about the joys of the perfect relationship.

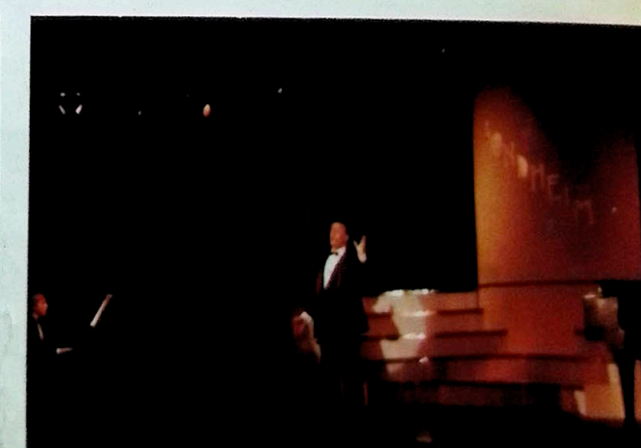
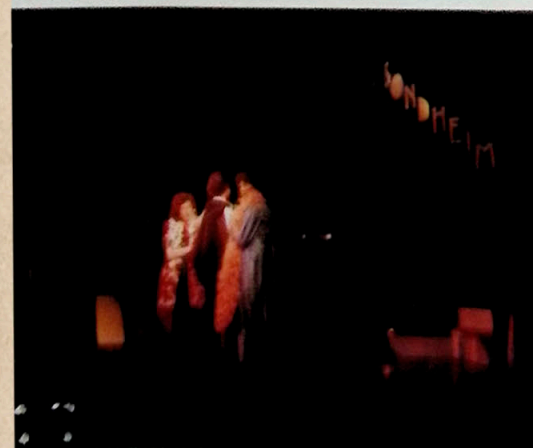
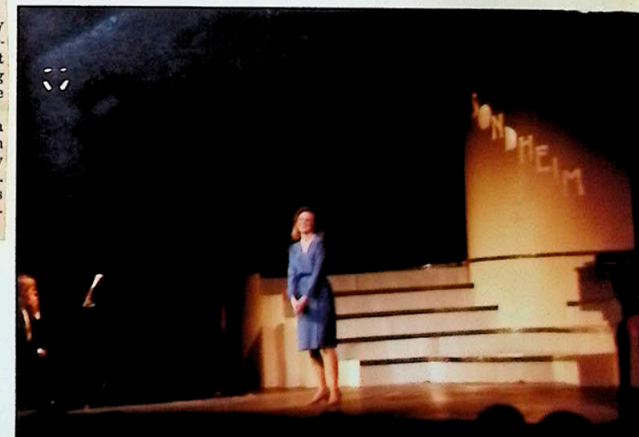
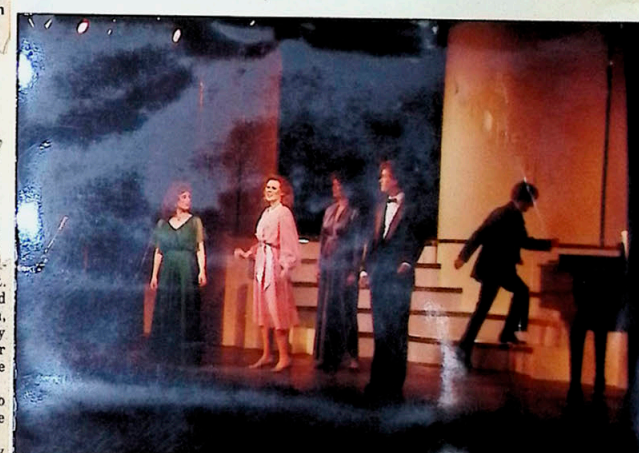
Woolley's clear soprano is a strong addition to the show, as is her pert and energetic stage presence.

Franklin is a seasoned performer, seen by Benicia audiences last year in Jacques Brel. His open, expressive face and unbounded energy can evoke a wide spectrum of emotions from the audience; from his somber "Could I Leave You?" to the silly "Buddy's Blues" a la Fred Astaire.

As an ensemble, the group is musically cohesive and really fun to watch. Their harmonies are beautiful, and when they belt out "You Could Drive a Person Crazy" after sticking their gum on the microphone, you've got to love 'em.

Again, the Washington House puts together a nice dinner preceding the performance, and in the customary style of the BOTTG, your every whim is attended to during cocktails and dinner.

For a totally enjoyable evening, don't miss Side by Side by Sondheim by BOTTG...the combination is a winner.



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Linda Barron



Willa Lampi



Fred Franklin Linda Barron Jim Niel



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